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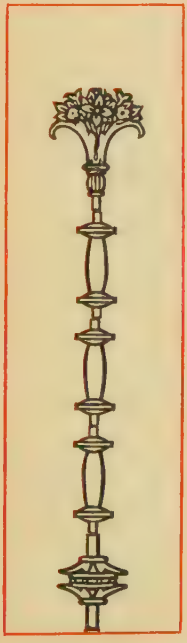
WARWICK CASTLE, FROM THE AVON.

Connoisseur's Edition

Historical Tales

The Romance of Reality



King Arthur

Volume I.

By

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"HALF-HOURS WITH THE BEST AMERICAN AUTHORS," "TALES FROM THE DRAMATISTS," ETC.

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INTRODUCTION.

GEOFFREY of Monmouth, the famous chronicler of legendary British history, tells us,—in reference to the time when the Celtic kings of Britain were struggling against the Saxon invaders,—that "there appeared a star of wonderful magnitude and brightness, darting its rays, at the end of which was a globe of fire in the form of a dragon, out of whose mouth issued two rays; one of which seemed to stretch itself beyond the extent of Gaul, the other towards the Irish Sea, and ended in two lesser rays." He proceeds to say, that Merlin, the magician, being called on to explain this portent, declared that the dragon represented Uther, the brother of King Ambrose, who was destined himself soon to become king; that the ray extending towards Gaul indicated a great son, who should conquer the Gallic Kingdoms; and that the ray with two lesser rays indicated a daughter, whose son and grandson should successively reign over Britain. Uther, in consequence, when he came to the throne, had two gold dragons made, one of which he placed in the cathedral of Winchester, which it brightly illuminated; the other he kept, and from it gained the name of

Pendragon. The powerful ray represented his great son Arthur, destined to become the flower of chivalry, and the favorite hero of mediæval romance.

This is history as Geoffrey of Monmouth understood it, but hardly so in the modern sense, and Arthur remains as mystical a figure as Achilles, despite the efforts of various writers to bring him within the circle of actual kings. After the Romans left Britain, two centuries passed of whose history hardly a coherent shred remains. This was the age of Arthur, one of the last champions of Celtic Britain against the inflowing tide of Anglo-Saxon invasion. That there was an actual Arthur there is some, but no very positive, reason to believe. After all the evidence has been offered, we still seem to have but a shadowy hero before us, "a king of shreds and patches," whose history is so pieced out with conjecture that it is next to impossible to separate its facts from its fancies.

The Arthur of the legends, of the Welsh and Breton ballads, of the later *Chansons de Geste*, of Malory and Tennyson, has quite stepped out of the historic page, and become a hero without time or place in any real world, a king of the imagination, the loftiest figure in that great outgrowth of chivalric romance which formed the favorite fictitious literature of Europe during three or four of the mediæval centuries. Charlemagne, the leading character in the earlier romances of chiv-

alry, was, in the twelfth century, replaced by Arthur, a milder and more Christian-like hero, whose adventures, with those of his Knights of the Round Table, delighted the tenants of court and castle in that marvel-loving and uncritical age. That the stories told of him are all fiction cannot be declared. Many of them may have been founded on fact. But, like the stones of a prehistoric wall, their facts are so densely enveloped by the ivy of fiction that it is impossible to delve them out.

The ballads and romances in which the King Arthur of mediæval story figures as the hero, would scarcely prove pleasant and profitable reading to us now, however greatly they delighted our ancestors. They are marked by a coarseness and crudity which would be but little to our taste. Nor have we anything of modern growth to replace them. Milton entertained a purpose of making King Arthur the hero of an epic poem, but fortunately yielded it for the nobler task of "Paradise Lost." Spenser gives this hero a minor place in his "Fairie Queen." Dryden projected a King Arthur epic, but failed to write it. Recently Bulwer has given us a cumbersome "King Arthur," which nobody reads; and Tennyson has handled the subject brilliantly in his "Idyls of the King," splendid successes as poems, yet too infiltrated with the spirit of modernism to be acceptable as a reproduction of the Arthur of romance. For a true rehabilitation of this hero

of the age of chivalry we must go to the "Morte Darthur" of Sir Thomas Malory, a writer of the fifteenth century, who lived when men still wore armor, and so near to the actual age of chivalry as to be in full sympathy with the spirit of its fiction, and its pervading love of adventure and belief in the magical.

Malory did a work of high value in editing the confused mass of earlier fiction, lopping off its excrescences and redundancies, reducing its coarseness of speech, and producing from its many stories and episodes a coherent and continuous narrative, in which the adventures of the Round Table Knights are deftly interwoven with the record of the birth, life, and death of the king, round whom as the central figure all these knightly champions revolve. Malory seems to have used as the basis of his work perhaps one, perhaps several, old French prose romances, and possibly also material derived from Welsh and English ballads. Such material in his day was doubtless abundant. Geoffrey had drawn much of his legendary history from the ancient Welsh ballads. The mass of romantic fiction which he called history became highly popular, first in Brittany, and then in France, the Trouveres making Arthur, Lancelot, Tristram, Percival, and others of the knightly circle the heroes of involved romances, in which a multitude of new incidents were invented. The Minnesingers of Germany took up the same fruitful theme, pro-

ducing a "Parzivale," a "Tristan and Isolt," and other heroic romances. From all this mass of material, Malory wrought his "Morte Darthur," as Homer wrought his "Iliad" from the preceding warlike ballads, and the unknown compiler of the "Nibelungenlied" wrought his poem from similar ancient sources.

Malory was not solely an editor. He was in a large sense a creator. It was coarse and crude material with which he had to deal, but in his hands its rude prose gained a degree of poetic fervor. The legends which he preserves he has in many cases transmuted from base into precious coin. There is repulsive matter in the old romances, which he freely cuts out. To their somewhat wooden heroes he gives life and character, so that in Lancelot, Gawaine, Dinadan, Kay, and others we have to deal with distinct personalities, not with the non-individualized hard-hitters of the romances. And to the whole story he gives an epic completeness which it lacked before. In the early days of Arthur's reign Merlin warns him that fate has already woven its net about him, and that the sins of himself and his queen will in the end bring his reign to a violent termination, and break up that grand fellowship of the Round Table which has made Britain and its king illustrious. This epic character of Malory's work is pointed out in the article "Geoffrey of Monmouth" in the "Encyclopædia Britannica," whose writer says that the Arthurian legends

"were converted into a magnificent prose poem by Sir Thomas Malory in 1461. Malory's *Morte Darthur* is as truly *the* epic of the English mind as the *Iliad* is the epic of the Greek mind."

Yet the "Morte Darthur," if epic in plan and treatment, is by no means free from the defects of primitive literature. It was written before the age of criticism, and confusion reigns supreme in many of its pages,—a confusion which a very little critical supervision might have removed. As an instance, we find that Galahad, two years after his birth, is made a knight, being then fifteen years old. In like manner the "seat perilous" at the Round Table is magically reserved for Galahad, the author evidently forgetting that he had already given it to Percivale. King Mark's murder of his brother Baldwin is revenged by Baldwin's grandson, thirty or forty years afterward, though there is nothing to show that the characters had grown a year older in the interval. Here a knight finds one antagonist quite sufficient for one man; there he does not hesitate to attack fifty at once; here a slight wound disables him; there a dozen deep wounds are fully healed by a night's rest. Many similar instances might be given, but these will suffice. The discrepancies here indicated were perhaps due to the employment of diverse legends, without care to bring them into accordance, but they lay the work open to adverse criticism.

This lack of critical accuracy may have been

a necessary accompaniment of the credulous frame of mind that could render such a work possible. It needed an artlessness of mental make-up, a full capacity for acceptance of the marvellous, a simple-minded faith in chivalry and its doings, which could scarcely exist in common with the critical temperament. In truth, the flavor of an age of credulity and simplicity of thought everywhere permeates this quaint old work, than which nothing more artless, simple, and unique exists in literature, and nothing with a higher value as a presentation of the taste in fiction of our mediæval predecessors.

Yet the "Morte Darthur" is not easy or attractive reading, to other than special students of literature. Aside from its confusion of events and arrangement, it tells the story of chivalry with a monotonous lack of inflection that is apt to grow wearisome, and in a largely obsolete style and dialect with whose difficulties readers in general may not care to grapple. Its pages present an endless succession of single combats with spear and sword, whose details are repeated with wearisome iteration. Knights fight furiously for hours together, till they are carved with deep wounds, and the ground crimsoned with gore. Sometimes they are so inconsiderate as to die, sometimes so weak as to seek a leech, but as often they mount and ride away in philosophical disregard of their wounds, and come up fresh for as fierce a fight the next day.

As for a background of scenery and architecture, it scarcely exists. Deep interest in man and woman seems to have shut out all scenic accessories from the mind of the good old knight. It is always but a step from the castle to the forest, into which the knights-errant plunge, and where most of their adventures take place; and the favorite resting- and jousting-place is by the side of forest springs—or wells, as in the text. We have mention abundant of fair castles, fair valleys, fair meadows, and the like, the adjective "fair" going far to serve all needs of description. But in his human characters, with their loves and hates, jousts and battles, bewitchments and bewilderments, the author takes deep interest, and follows the episodical stories which are woven into the plot with a somewhat too satisfying fulness. In evidence of the dramatic character of many of these episodes we need but refer to the "Idyls of the King," whose various romantic and tragic narratives are all derived from this quaint "old master" of fictitious literature.

With all its faults of style and method, the "Morte Darthur" is a very live book. It never stops to moralize or philosophize, but keeps strictly to its business of tale-telling, bringing up before the reader a group of real men and women, not a series of lay-figures on a background of romance, as in his originals.

Kay with his satirical tongue, Dinadan with his love of fun, Tristram loving and noble, Lancelot

bold and chivalrous, Gawaine treacherous and implacable, Arthur kingly but adventurous, Mark cowardly and base-hearted, Guenever jealous but queenly, Isolde tender and faithful, and a host of other clearly individualized knights and ladies move in rapid succession through the pages of the romance, giving it, with its manners of a remote age, a vital interest that appeals to modern tastes.

In attempting to adapt this old masterpiece to the readers of our own day, we have no purpose to seek to paraphrase or improve on Malory. To remove the antique flavor would be to destroy the spirit of the work. We shall leave it as we find it, other than to reduce its obsolete phraseology and crudities of style to modern English, abridge the narrative where it is wearisomely extended, omit repetitions and uninteresting incidents, reduce its confusion of arrangement, attempt a more artistic division into books and chapters, and by other arts of editorial revision seek to make it easier reading, while preserving as fully as possible those unique characteristics which have long made it delightful to lovers of old literature.

The task here undertaken is no light one, nor is success in it assured. Malory has an individuality of his own which gives a peculiar charm to his work, and to retain this in a modernized version is the purpose with which we set out and which we hope to accomplish. The world of to-day is full of fiction, endless transcripts of modern life served

up in a great variety of palatable forms. Our castle-living forefathers were not so abundantly favored. They had no books,—and could not have read them if they had,—but the wandering minstrel took with them the place of the modern volume, bearing from castle to court, and court to castle, his budget of romances of magic and chivalry, and delighting the hard-hitting knights and barons of that day with stirring ballads and warlike tales to which their souls rose in passionate response.

In the "Morte Darthur" is preserved to us the pith of the best of those old romances, brought into a continuous narrative by one who lived when chivalry yet retained some of its vital hold on the minds of men, and who, being a knight himself, could enter with heartfelt sympathy into the deeds of the knights of an earlier age. Certainly many of the readers of modern fiction will find a pleasure in turning aside awhile from the hot-pressed thought of the nineteenth-century novel to this fresh and breezy outcrop from the fiction of an earlier day; with the double purpose of learning on what food the minds of our ancestors were fed, and of gaining a breath of wild perfume from the far-off field of the romance of chivalry. That the story of Arthur and his Knights can arouse in modern readers the intense interest with which it was received by mediæval auditors is not to be expected. We are too far removed in time and manners from the age of knight-

errantry to enter deeply into sympathy with its unfamiliar ways. Yet a milder interest may still be awakened in what gave our predecessors such enthusiastic delight, and some at least may turn with pleasure from the most philosophic of modern novels to wander awhile through this primitive domain of thought.

To such we offer this work, which we have simply sought to make easy reading, with little further liberty with Malory's quaint prose than to put it into a modern dress, and with the hope that no such complete divorce exists between the world of the present and that of the past as to render the exploits of King Arthur and his Round Table Knights dull, wearisome, and profitless reading, void of the human interest which they once possessed in such large and satisfying measure.

KING ARTHUR

AND THE

KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE.

BOOK I.

HOW ARTHUR WON THE THRONE.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAGIC SWORD.

ONCE upon a time, in that far-off and famous era of chivalry and knight-errantry when wandering knights sought adventures far and wide throughout the land, and no damsel in distress failed to enlist a valiant champion in her cause, there reigned over England's broad realm a noble monarch, King Arthur by name, the flower of chivalry, and the founder of the world-renowned order of Knights of the Round Table. It is the story of this far-famed monarch, and of the wonderful and valorous deeds of his Knights, that we here propose to tell, as preserved in the ancient legends of the land, and set forth at length in the chronicles of the days of chivalry.

Before the days of Arthur the King, there

reigned over all England Uther Pendragon, a monarch of might and renown. He died at length in years and honor, and after his death anarchy long prevailed in the land, for no son of his appeared to claim the throne, and many of the lords who were high in rank and strong in men sought to win it by force of arms, while everywhere lawlessness and wrong-doing made life a burden and wealth a deceit.

But by good fortune there still survived the famous magician Merlin, the master of all mysteries, who long had been the stay of Uther's throne, and in whose hands lay the destiny of the realm. For after years of anarchy, and when men had almost lost hope of right and justice, Merlin, foreseeing that the time for a change was at hand, went to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and bade him summon to London by Christmas day all the lords of the realm and the gentlemen of arms, for on that day a miracle would be shown by which would be decided who should be ruler of the kingless realm.

The summons was issued, and by Christmas-tide many lords and knights, the flower of England's chivalry, had gathered in London, most of them full of ambition and many of them buoyed up by hope. In the greatest church of that city prayers went up night and day, all who had been guilty of wrong-doing seeking to clear their souls of sin; for all believed that only through God's grace could any man come to dominion in the realm,

and those who aspired to the throne ardently sought to make their peace with God.

On Christmas day, after the hour of matins and the first mass, came the miracle which Merlin had predicted; for there suddenly appeared before the high altar in the church-yard a great four-square block of stone, of the texture of marble, upon which stood an anvil of steel a foot in height; and through the anvil and deep into the stone was thrust a gleaming sword, upon which, in letters of gold, ran these words, "Whoso pulleth this sword out of this stone is of right born king of all England."

Whether Merlin performed this strange thing by magic, or it was a miracle of God's will, the chronicles say not, but all who saw it deeply marvelled, and word of it was brought to the archbishop in the church.

"Let no man stir," he enjoined. "This is God's doing, and must be dealt with gravely and solemnly. I command that all stay within the church and pray unto God until the high mass be done. Till then let no hand touch the sword."

And so the service went on until its end; but after it was done the audience hastened to behold the miracle, and some of the higher lords, who were ambitious for the throne, laid eager hold upon the sword and sought with all their strength to draw it. Yet all in vain they tugged; the mightiest among them could not stir the deep-thrust blade.

"The man is not here," said the archbishop, "who shall draw that sword; but God, in His own good season, will make him known. This, then, is my counsel: let us set ten knights, men of fame and honor, to guard the sword, and let every man that has faith in his good fortune seek to draw it. He who is the destined monarch of England will in time appear."

New Year's day came, and no man yet had drawn the sword, though many had adventured. For that day the barons had ordered that a stately tournament should be held, in which all knights who desired to break a lance for God and their ladies might take part. This was greeted with high acclaim, and after the services of the day had ended the barons and knights together rode to the lists, while multitudes of the citizens of London crowded thither to witness the knightly sports. Among those who rode were Sir Hector, a noble lord, who held domains in England and Wales, and with him his son Sir Kay, a new-made knight, and his younger son Arthur, a youth still too young for knighthood.

As they rode together to the lists, Kay discovered that he had forgotten his sword, having left it behind at his father's lodging. He begged young Arthur to ride back for it.

"Trust me to bring it," replied Arthur, readily, and turning his horse he rode briskly back to his father's lodging in the city. On reaching the house, however, he found it fast locked, all its

inmates having gone to the tournament. The young man stood a moment in anger and indecision.

"My brother Kay shall not be without a sword," he said. "I remember seeing in the church-yard a handsome blade thrust into a stone, and seeming to want an owner. I shall ride thither and get that sword. It will serve Kay's turn."

He accordingly turned his horse and rode back in all haste. On reaching the church-yard he found no knights there, all those who had been placed on guard having gone to the jousting, exchanging duty for sport. Dismounting and tying his horse, he entered the tent which had been erected over the stone. There stood the magic sword, its jewelled hilt and half the shining blade revealed. Heedless of the inscription on the polished steel, and ignorant of its lofty promise,—for the miracle had been kept secret by the knights,—young Arthur seized the weapon strongly by the hilt and gave the magic sword a vigorous pull. Then a wondrous thing happened, which it was a pity there were none to see; for the blade came easily out of stone and steel, as though they were yielding clay, and lay naked in his hand. Not knowing the might and meaning of what he had none, and thinking of naught but to keep his word, the young man mounted his horse and rode to the field, where he delivered the sword to his brother Sir Kay.

"I have brought your sword," he said.

The young knight started with surprise on beholding the blade, and gazed on it with wonder and trepidation. It was not his, he knew, and he recognized it at sight for the magic blade. But ambition quickly banished the wonder from his heart, and he rode hastily to his father, Sir Hector, exclaiming,—

"Behold! Here is the sword of the stone! I that bear it am the destined king of England's realm."

Sir Hector looked at him in doubt, and beheld the blade he bore with deep surprise.

"When and how did you obtain it?" he demanded. "Back to the church! Come with us, Arthur. Here is a mystery that must be explained."

Reaching the church, he made Kay swear upon the book how he came by that weapon, for greatly he doubted.

"I have not said I drew it," Kay replied, sullenly. "In truth, it was not achieved by me. Arthur brought me the sword."

"Arthur!" cried the lord. "Arthur brought it! How got you it, boy?"

"I pulled it from the stone," replied the youth. "Kay sent me home for his sword, but the house was empty and locked; and as I did not wish my brother to be without a weapon, I rode hither and pulled this blade out of the stone. Was there aught strange in that? It came out easily enough."

"Were there no knights about it?"

"None, sir."

"Then the truth is plain. God's will has been revealed. You are the destined king of England."

"I?" cried Arthur, in surprise. "Wherefore I?"

"God has willed it so," repeated the baron. "But I must first learn for myself if you have truly drawn the sword. Can you put it back again?"

"I can try," said Arthur, and with an easy thrust he sunk the blade deeply into the stone.

Then Sir Hector and Kay pulled at the hilt with all their strength, but failed to move the weapon.

"Now you shall try," they said to Arthur.

Thereupon the youth seized the hilt, and with a light effort the magic sword came out naked in his hand.

"You are our king!" cried Sir Hector, kneeling on the earth, and Kay beside him.

"My dear father and brother," cried Arthur in surprise and distress, "why kneel you to me? Rise, I pray; it pains me deeply to see you thus."

"I am not your father nor of your kindred," rejoined the baron. "I must now reveal the secret I long have kept. You were brought to me in infancy, and I and my wife have fostered you as our own. But you are no son of mine. Who you truly are I cannot say; that only Merlin the magician knows. But well I feel assured you are of nobler blood than I can boast."

These words filled Arthur with heartfelt pain.

He had long revered the worthy knight as his father, and it grieved him deeply to learn that those whom he had so warmly loved were not of kin to him.

"Sir," said Hector, "will you be my good and gracious lord when you are king?"

"You, my father, and your good lady, my mother,—to whom else in all the world am I so beholden?" rejoined Arthur, warmly. "God forbid that I should fail you in whatever you may desire, if by His will and grace I shall be made king."

"This only I ask of you," said the baron: "that you make Kay, my son and your foster-brother, the seneschal of all your lands."

"By the faith of my body, I promise," said Arthur. "No man but he shall have that office while he and I live."

These words said, Sir Hector went to the archbishop and told him, much to his surprise, of the marvel that had been performed. By the advice of the prelate it was kept secret until Twelfth Day, when the barons came again, and another effort was made to draw the sword.

After all had tried and failed, Arthur was brought forward, and while many sneered at his youth and asked why a boy had been brought thither, he seized the hilt and lightly drew the blade from the stone. Then all stood aghast in wonder, marvelling greatly to see a youth perform the feat which the strongest knights in the

kingdom had attempted in vain; but many beheld it with bitter anger and hostile doubt.

"Who is this boy?" they cried. "What royal blood can he claim? Shall we and the realm of England be shamed by being governed by a base-born churl? There is fraud or magic in this."

So high ran the tide of adverse feeling that the archbishop finally decided that another trial should be had at Candlemas, ten knights meanwhile closely guarding the stone. And when Candlemas day arrived there came many more great lords, each eager for the throne; but, as before, of all there none but Arthur could draw the magic sword.

Again was there envy and hostility, and another trial was loudly demanded, the time being fixed for Easter. This ended as before, and at the demand of the angry lords a final trial was arranged for the feast of Pentecost. The archbishop now, at Merlin's suggestion, surrounded Arthur with a body-guard of tried warriors, some of whom had been Uther Pendragon's best and worthiest knights; for it was feared that some of his enemies might seek to do him harm. They were bidden to keep watch over him day and night till the season of Pentecost, for there were lords that would have slain him had they dared.

At the feast of Pentecost lords and knights gathered again, but in vain they all essayed to draw the magic sword. Only to the hand of Arthur would it yield, and he pulled it lightly

from the stone and steel in the presence of all the lords and commons. Then cried the commons in loud acclaim,—

"Arthur shall be our king! We will have none to reign over us but him! Let there be no more delay. God has willed that he shall be England's king, and he that holdeth out longer against the will of God that man shall we slay."

Then rich and poor alike kneeled before Arthur, hailed him as king, and craved his pardon for their long delay. He forgave them freely, and taking the sword between his hands, laid it upon the altar before the archbishop. This done, he was made a knight by the worthiest warrior there, and thus taken into that noble fellowship of chivalry which he was destined by his valor and virtue to so richly adorn.

Shortly afterward Arthur was crowned king, with great pomp and ceremony, before a noble assemblage of the lords and ladies of the realm, taking solemn oath at the coronation to be true king to lords and commons, and to deal justice to all while he should live.

Justice, indeed, was greatly and urgently demanded, for many wrongs had been done since the death of King Uther, and numerous complaints were laid before the throne. All these evils Arthur redressed, forcing those who had wrongfully taken the lands of others to return them, and demanding that all should submit to the laws of the realm. In compliance with his

promise, Sir Kay was made seneschal of England, while other knights were appointed to the remaining high offices of the realm, and all the needs of the kingdom duly provided for. Thus the famous reign of King Arthur auspiciously began, with God's and man's blessing upon its early days.

CHAPTER II.

ARTHUR'S WARS AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS BIRTH.

After Arthur was crowned king he removed into Wales, where he gave orders that a great feast should be held on the coming day of Pentecost, at the city of Carlion. On the day appointed for the feast there appeared before Carlion the Kings of Lothian and Orkney, Gore, Garloth, Carados, and Scotland, each with a large following of knights. Their coming greatly pleased King Arthur, who believed that they desired to do honor to his reign, and he sent presents of great value to them and to their knights.

These they disdainfully refused, sending back a hostile challenge by the messenger, and saying that they had not come to receive gifts from a beardless boy, of ignoble blood, but to present him gifts with hard swords between neck and shoulder. It was a shame, they said, to see such

a boy at the head of so noble a realm, and this wrong should be redressed at their hands.

On receiving this defiant message, Arthur threw himself, with five hundred good men, into a strong tower near Carlion, for he was ill prepared for attack. There he was closely besieged by his foes, but the castle was well victualled, and held out stoutly against its assailants.

During the siege Merlin appeared suddenly among the kings, and told them privately who Arthur really was, assuring them that he was of nobler blood than themselves, and was destined long to remain king of England, and to reduce Scotland, Ireland, and Wales to his sway. Some of the hostile monarchs believed the magician's story, but others doubted it, King Lot of Orkney laughing him to scorn, while some among them called him a prating wizard.

But it was agreed that they should hold a conference with Arthur, they promising if he came out to them to place no hindrance to his safe return. Merlin then sought the king and advised him to accept the conference, telling him that he had nothing to fear. Thereupon Arthur armed himself, and taking with him the Archbishop of Canterbury and several noble knights, went out boldly to meet his foes.

The conference was an angry and bitter one, the kings speaking strongly, and Arthur answering them with stout words of defiance, in which he told them plainly that if he lived he

would make them bow to his throne. In the end they parted in wrath, the kings returning to their camp and Arthur to the tower.

"What do you propose to do?" said Merlin to the kings. "If you take a wise man's advice you will withdraw, for I tell you that you shall not prevail here, were you ten times as many."

"We are not the men to be advised by a dream-reader," answered King Lot. "If you are the wise man you say, you will take yourself away." At this reply Merlin magically vanished from among them, and immediately appeared to King Arthur in the tower, bidding him boldly to sally forth and attack his enemies, and trust to fortune and valor for success. Meanwhile three hundred of the best knights of the kings had deserted their ranks and come to join him, much to his comfort, for he had been greatly outnumbered.

"Sir," said Merlin, "fight not with the sword that you had by miracle, till you see things go to the worst; then draw it out and strike shrewdly for your throne."

These words said, Arthur sallied from the tower at the head of all his knights, and fell fiercely on the besiegers in their camp. All went down before his bold assault, the hosts of the hostile kings retreating in dismay. Great deeds were done that day, Sir Kay and other knights slaying all before them, while Arthur laid on nobly, and did such marvellous feats of arms that all who saw him wondered greatly, for until now

he had been an untried youth. While the combat thus went on in Arthur's favor in front, King Lot and others of the kings made a detour and set fiercely upon his force from the rear, causing momentary dismay in his ranks. But Arthur wheeled alertly with his knights, and smote vigorously to right and left, keeping always in the foremost press, till his horse was slain beneath him, and he hurled to the ground.

King Lot took instant advantage of this, and with a mighty blow prostrated the unhorsed king. But his knights hastily surrounded him, drove back his crowding foes, and set him on horseback again. And now King Arthur drew the magic sword, and as he waved it in the air there flashed from it a gleaming lustre that blinded the eyes of his enemies. Back they went before him, many of them falling under his mighty blows, while his valiant knights followed hotly in the track of the flaming sword, and the enemy fled in panic fear.

Then the people of Carlion, seeing the enemy in retreat, came out with clubs and staves, and fell upon the defeated host, killing numbers of the dismounted knights; while the hostile kings, with such of their followers as remained alive, fled in all haste from the disastrous field, leaving the victory to Arthur and his knights.

Thus ended in victory the first battle of Arthur's famous reign. It was but the prelude to a greater one, the mighty deeds of which the chron

iclers tell at great length, but of which we shall give but brief record. It was predicted by Merlin, who told the king that he should have to fight far more strongly for his crown, that the defeated kings would get others to join them, and would ere long proceed against him with a mighty force.

"I warn you," he said to the king and his council, "that your enemies are very strong, for they have entered into alliance with four other kings and a mighty duke, and unless our king obtain powerful allies he shall be overcome and slain."

"What then shall we do?" asked the barons.

"I shall tell you," said Merlin. "There are two brethren beyond the sea, both kings, and marvellously valiant men. One of these is King Ban of Benwick, and the other King Bors of Gaul These monarchs are at war with a mighty warrior, King Claudas. My counsel then is, that our king ask the aid of these monarchs in his wars, and engage in return to help them in their war with their foe."

"It is well counselled," said the king and his barons.

Accordingly two knights with letters were sent across the seas, and after various adventures reached the camp of Kings Ban and Bors. These valiant monarchs gladly responded to Arthur's request, and, leaving their castles well guarded, came with ten thousand of their best men to the aid of the youthful king. Then were held great

feasts, and a noble tournament was given on All-hallowmas day, at which Sir Kay carried off the honors of the lists and received the prize of valor.

But sport had soon to give place to war, for the hostile kings, now eleven in all, with a host of fifty thousand mounted men and ten thousand footmen, were marching upon King Arthur's camp, then at the Castle of Bedegraine, in Sherwood forest.

Two nights before the hosts met in battle, one of the hostile leaders, known as the king with the hundred knights, dreamed a wondrous dream. It seemed to him that there came a mighty wind, which blew down all their castles and towns, and that then there came a great flood and carried all away. All who heard this dream said that it was a token of great battle, but by its portent none were dismayed, for they felt too secure in their strength to heed the warning of a dream.

Soon the two armies drew together, and encamped at no great distance asunder. Then, by advice of Merlin, a midnight attack was made by Arthur and his allies upon the host of the eleven kings, as they lay sleeping in their tents. But their sentinels were alert, the sound of the coming host reached their wakeful ears, and loud the cry ran through the camp:

"To arms! lords and knights, to arms! The enemy is upon us! To arms! to arms!"

On like a wave of war came the force of Arthur, Ban, and Bors. The tents were overthrown,

and all the valor of the eleven kings was needed to save their army from defeat. So fiercely went the assault that by day-dawn ten thousand of their men lay dead upon the field, while Arthur's loss was but small.

By Merlin's advice, while it was yet dark the forces of Ban and Bors had been placed in ambush in the forest. Then Arthur, with his own army of twenty thousand men, set fiercely on the overwhelming force of the foe, and deeds of mighty prowess were done, men falling like leaves, and many knights of tried valor staining the earth with their blood.

Fiercely went the combat, hand to hand and blade to blade, till the field was strewn with the dead, while none could tell how the battle would end. But when Kings Ban and Bors broke from their ambush, with ten thousand fresh men, the tide of battle turned against the foe. Back they went, step by step, many of their men taking to flight, and hundreds falling in death. King Bors did marvellous deeds of arms. King Ban, whose horse was killed, fought on foot like an enraged lion, standing among dead men and horses, and felling all who came within reach of his sword. As for King Arthur, his armor was so covered with crimson stains that no man knew him, and his horse went fetlock deep in blood.

When night approached, the hostile force was driven across a little stream, the eleven warrior kings still valiantly facing the victorious foe

Then came Merlin into the press of struggling knights, mounted on a great black horse, and cried to Arthur,—

"Wilt thou never have done? Of threescore thousand men this day thou hast left alive but fifteen thousand, and it is time to cry, Halt! I bid you withdraw, for if you continue the battle fortune will turn against you. As for these kings, you will have no trouble with them for three years to come, for more than forty thousand Saracens have landed in their country, and are burning and despoiling all before them."

This advice was taken, and the defeated kings were allowed to withdraw the remnant of their forces without further harm, while King Arthur richly rewarded his allies and their knights from the treasure found in the hostile camp.

Thus was King Arthur seated firmly on his throne. But who he was he knew not yet, for the mystery that lay over his birth Merlin had never revealed. After the battle Merlin went to his master Bleise, who dwelt in Northumberland, and told him the events of the mighty contest. These Bleise wrote down, word by word, as he did the after-events of King Arthur's reign, and the deeds of his valiant knights. And so was made the chronicle of the great achievements of arms, and the adventures of errant knights, from which this history is drawn.

Of some things that Merlin further did we must here speak. While Arthur dwelt in the castle of

Bedegraine, Merlin came to him so disguised that the king knew him not. He was all befurred in black sheepskins, with a great pair of boots and a bow and arrows, and brought wild geese in his hand, as though he had been a huntsman.

"Sir," he said to the king, "will you give me a gift?"

"Why should I do so, churl?" asked the king.

"You had better give me a gift from what you have in hand than to lose great riches which are now out of your reach; for here, where the battle was fought, is great treasure hidden in the earth."

"Who told you that, churl?"

"Merlin told me so."

Then was the king abashed, for he now knew that it was Merlin who spoke, and it troubled him that he had not known his best friend.

Afterward, on a day when Arthur had been hunting in the forest, and while he sat in deep thought over a strange dream he had dreamed and some sinful deeds he had done, there came to him a child of fourteen years, and asked him why he was so pensive.

"I may well be so," replied Arthur, "for I have much to make me think."

"I know that well," said the seeming child, "also who thou art and all thy thoughts. I can tell thee who was thy father and how and when thou wert born."

"That is false," rejoined the king. "How should a boy of your years know my father?"

"He was Uther Pendragon, the king," replied the seeming boy, "and you are of royal blood."

"How can you know that? I will not believe you without better proof," said Arthur.

At these words the child departed, but quickly after there came to the king an old man of fourscore years.

"Why are you so sad?" asked the old man.

"For many things," replied Arthur. "Here but now was a child who told me things which it seems to me he could not know."

"He told you the truth," said the old man, "and would have told you more if you had listened. This I am bidden to tell you, that you have done things which have displeased God, and that your sister shall bear a son who will destroy you and all the knights of your land. That is the meaning of your dream in which griffons and serpents burnt and slew all before them, and wounded you to the death."

"Who are you," said Arthur, "that tell me these things?"

"I am Merlin," replied the old man. "And I was the child who came to you."

"You are a marvellous man," replied Arthur. "But how can you know that I shall die in battle?"

"How I know matters not, but this much more I am bidden to tell you: your death will be a noble one; but I shall die a shameful death, and shall be put in the earth alive for my follies. Such is the voice of destiny."

While they conversed thus, horses were brought to the king, and he and Merlin mounted and rode to Carlion. Here Arthur told Sir Hector what he had heard, and asked if it were true.

"I believe it to be the truth," answered the old baron. "Merlin has told me that the child he brought to my castle was the son of King Uther Pendragon and of Queen Igraine, his wife."

But Arthur was not yet convinced, and sent in all haste for Queen Igraine, who dwelt in a castle not far away, and came quickly with Morgan le Fay, her daughter, a fair lady, and one who had been taught all the arts of necromancy.

The king welcomed her with rich cheer, and made a feast in her honor, without saying why he had asked her to his court. But when the feast was at its height, Sir Ulfius, the chamberlain, and a knight of worth and honor, rose in the midst, and boldly accused the queen of falsehood and treason.

"Beware what you say," cried the king. "Those are strong words, and this lady is my guest."

"I am well advised of what I say," replied Ulfius, "and here is my glove to prove it upon any man who shall deny it. I declare that Queen Igraine is the cause of your great wars and of deep damage to your throne. Had she told in the life of King Uther of the birth of her son you would have been spared your wars, for most of your barons know not to-day of what blood you

were born. Therefore I declare her false to God, to you, and to all your realm, and if any man shall say me nay I stand ready to prove it upon his body."

"I am a woman, and I may not fight," said Queen Igraine to this. "But there are men here will take my quarrel. Merlin will bear me witness that it was King Uther's wish, for reasons of state, that the birth of my child should be concealed, and if you seek a traitor you should accuse Uther Pendragon and not me. At its birth the child was wrapped in cloth of gold, by order of the king, and taken from me, and from that day to this I have not set eyes upon my son."

"Then," said Ulfius, "Merlin is more to blame than you."

"I bowed to the will of my husband," replied the queen. "After the death of my lord, the Duke of Tintagel, King Uther married me, and I bore him a son, but I know not what has become of my child."

Then Merlin took the king by the hand and led him to Queen Igraine.

"This is your mother," he said.

Therewith, Sir Hector bore witness how the child has been brought by Merlin to the postern gate of his castle, wrapped in cloth of gold, and how he had reared him as his own son, knowing not who he was, but full sure he was of high birth.

These words removed all doubt from Arthur's

mind, and with warm affection he took his mother in his arms, and kissed her lovingly, while tears of joy flowed freely from the eyes of mother and son, for never was gladder meeting than that which there took place.

For eight days thereafter feasts and sports were held at the castle, and great joy fell upon all men to learn that the son of great Uther Pendragon had come to the throne. And far and wide the story spread through the land that he who had drawn the magic sword was the rightful heir to England's crown.

CHAPTER III.

THE LADY OF THE LAKE.

On a day at the end of the feasts given by King Arthur in honor of his mother, there came into the court a squire, who bore before him on his horse a knight that had been wounded unto death. He told how a stranger knight in the forest had set up a pavilion by a well, and forced all who passed to joust with him. This stranger had slain his master, and he begged that some champion would revenge the slain knight.

Then rose Griflet, a youthful squire who had done good service in the wars, and begged to be knighted, that he might undertake this adventure.

"Thou art but young for such a task," said Arthur.

"I beseech you for the honor of it," pleaded Griflet. "I have done you knightly service."

Thereupon he was knighted and armed, and rode at day-dawn with a high heart into the forest. But by night-fall back he came, with a spear-thrust through his body, and scarce able to sit his horse for weakness. He had met the knight, and barely escaped with his life.

This angered the king, and he determined to undertake the adventure himself, and to seek to punish the daring knight who had planted himself, with hostile purpose, so near his court. By his order his best armor and horse were set before day at a point outside the city, and at day-dawn he met there his squire and rode with him secretly into the forest.

On the way thither he met three churls, who were chasing Merlin and seeking to slay him. The king rode to them and sternly bade them desist, and on seeing a knight before them they fled in craven fear.

"O Merlin," cried Arthur, "for all your craft you would have been slain, had I not come to your aid."

"Not so. I but played with these churls," said Merlin. "I could have saved myself easily enough. You are far more near your end than I, for unless God be your friend you ride to your death."

As they conversed they came to the forest foun-

tain, and saw there a rich pavilion, while under a cloth stood a fair horse, richly saddled and bridled, and on a tree was a shield of varied colors and a great spear. In a chair near by sat an armed knight.

"How is it, sir knight," asked the king, sternly, "that you abide here and force every knight that passes to joust with you? It is an ill custom, and I bid you cease it."

"He who is grieved with my custom may amend it if he will," said the knight.

"I shall amend it," said Arthur.

"I shall defend it," replied the knight.

With these words they mounted, placed their spears in rest, and put their horses to their speed. Together they came in mid career with such violence and equal fortune that both spears were shivered to splinters, but both knights remained in their saddles. Taking new spears, once more they rode, and once again met in mid course with the same fortune as before. Then Arthur set hand to his sword.

"Nay," said the knight. "You are the best jouster of all the men I ever met. For the love of the high order of knighthood let us break another spear."

"I agree," said Arthur.

Two more spears were brought them, and again they rode together with all the might and speed of their horses. Arthur's spear once more shivered into splinters from point to handle. But the

knight struck him so fairly in the centre of his shield that horse and man together fell to the earth.

Then Arthur drew his sword eagerly and cried:

"Sir knight, I have lost the honor of horseback, and will fight you on foot."

"I will meet you on horse," replied the knight.

Angry at this, Arthur advanced towards him with ready shield and sword. But the knight, feeling that he was taking a noble adversary at unfair advantage, dismounted, and advanced to meet Arthur on foot.

Then began a mighty battle, in which many great sword-strokes were made, and much blood was lost by both antagonists. After the affray had long continued the two warriors by chance struck so evenly together that their swords met in mid air, and the weapon of the knight smote that of Arthur into two pieces.

"You are in my power," cried the knight. "Yield you as overcome and recreant, or you shall die."

"As for death," said Arthur, "it will be welcome when it comes, but I had rather die than be so shamed."

Thus saying, he leaped upon his foeman, took him by the middle with a vigorous grip, and threw him to the earth. Then he tore off his helmet. The knight, however, was much the larger and stronger man, and in his turn brought Arthur

under him, deprived him of his helmet, and lifted his sword to strike off his head.

At this perilous moment Merlin advanced.

"Knight, hold thy hand," he cried. "You little know in what peril you put this realm, or who the warrior is beneath your sword."

"Who is he?" asked the knight.

"He is King Arthur."

Then would the knight have slain Arthur for fear of his wrath, and raised his sword again to do so, but at that moment Merlin threw him into an enchanted sleep.

"What have you done, Merlin?" cried Arthur. "God grant you have not slain this worthy knight by your craft! I would yield a year of my dominion to have him alive again.'

"Do not fear," said Merlin. "He is asleep only, and will awake within three hours. And this I shall tell you, there is not a stronger knight in your kingdom than he, and hereafter he will do you good service. His name is King Pellinore, and he shall have two noble sons, whose names will be Percivale and Lamorak of Wales. And this brave knight shall, in the time to come, tell you the name of that son of your sister who is fated to be the destruction of all this land."

This being said, the king and the magician departed, leaving the knight to his magic slumbers. Soon they reached the cell of a hermit who was a noted leech, and who, with healing salves, in three days cured the king's wounds so that he

was able to ride again. As they now went forward, through forest and over plain, Arthur said,—

"I have no sword. I shall be ill put to it should I meet a champion."

"Heed not that," said Merlin. "That loss will be soon repaired."

And so they rode till they came to a lake, a broad and fair sheet of water, that stretched far before their eyes. As the king stood and looked upon it, he saw in its midst, to his deep wonder, an arm clothed in white samite lift itself above the water, and in the hand appeared a glittering sword, that gleamed brightly in the sun's rays.

"Lo! yonder is the sword I spoke of," said Merlin.

Then another wonder met their eyes, for a woman came walking towards them upon the surface of the lake.

"What damsel is that?" asked Arthur. "And what means all this wondrous thing?"

"That is the Lady of the Lake," said Merlin. "Within that lake is a great rock, and therein is a place as fair as any on the earth, and most richly adorned, wherein this lady dwells. When she comes to you ask her in courtly phrase for the sword, for it is hers to give."

Soon came the damsel to them and saluted Arthur, who courteously returned her salutation.

"Fair lady," he said, "what sword is it that yonder arm holds so strangely above the water? I would it were mine, for I have lost my weapon."

"King Arthur," replied the damsel, "the sword you see is mine. But it shall be yours if you will promise me a gift when I shall ask it of you."

"By my faith," rejoined Arthur, "I will give you whatever gift you may ask, if it be within reason and justice."

"Then," said the damsel, "go into the barge you see yonder and row yourself to the sword, and take it and the scabbard. As for the gift, I shall bide my time to ask it."

Arthur and Merlin now alighted and entered the boat they saw near by, rowing it to where the arm in white samite held up the sword. Reaching boldly out, Arthur grasped the weapon by the handle, and at once the arm and hand disappeared beneath the water, leaving the wondrous blade in his hand, and the scabbard with it.

When they reached the land again the Lady of the Lake was gone, and so they mounted and rode away from that place of magic. Then Arthur looked upon the sword and much he liked it, for the blade seemed to him of rare promise.

"Which like you the better, the sword or the scabbard?" asked Merlin.

"The sword," answered Arthur.

"There you lack wisdom," said Merlin, "for the scabbard is worth ten of the sword. While you wear that scabbard you shall never lose blood, however sorely you be wounded, so take good heed to keep it always with you."

So they rode unto Carlion, where Arthur's

knights were glad enough to see him, for his absence had greatly troubled them. And when they heard of his adventures they marvelled that he would risk his person so alone. But all men of worship said that it was merry to be under a chieftain who would take upon himself such adventures as poor knights loved to meet.

During the absence of the king a messenger had come to the court from King Ryons of North Wales, who was also King of Ireland, and of many islands, bearing a message of most insulting purport. He said that King Ryons had discomfited and overcome eleven kings, each of whom had been forced to do him homage in the following manner: each had sent him his beard, and the king had trimmed his mantle with these kings' beards. But there lacked one place on the mantle, and he therefore sent for King Arthur's beard to complete the fringe. If it were not sent him he would enter the land and burn and slay, and never leave till he had head and beard together.

"Well," said Arthur, "you have said your message, and the most villanous one it is that ever living man sent unto a king; you may see, moreover, that my beard as yet is somewhat too young to serve as a trimming to his mantle. This, then, you may tell your king. Neither I nor my lords owe him any homage. But if he shall not before many days do me homage on both his bended knees, by the faith of my body he shall lose his

head, in requital for the shameful and discourteous message that he has sent me. Bear you this answer to your king."

And so the messenger departed.

CHAPTER IV.

GUENEVER AND THE ROUND TABLE.

And now we have to tell the story of how King Arthur got his fair wife Guenever, and how the Round Table was brought to England's realm.

After the defeat of the eleven kings, Arthur had rescued King Leodegrance of Cameliard from King Ryons, and put the latter with all his host to flight. And at the court of Leodegrance he saw his charming daughter Guenever, whom he ever after loved.

So it fell upon a time that Arthur said to Merlin,—

"My barons give me no peace, but day by day insist that I shall take a wife. But whether I marry or not, I shall take no step without your counsel and advice."

"Your barons counsel well," said Merlin. "A man of your bounty and nobleness should not be without a wife. Is there any one woman that you love beyond others?"

"Yes, by my faith there is," said Arthur. "I

love Guenever, the daughter of King Leodegrance, of Cameliard, he who has in his house the Round Table, which you have told me he had of my father King Uther. This damsel is the loveliest lady that I know, or could ever hope to find."

"Of her beauty and fairness no man can question," said Merlin. "If your heart were not set, I could find you a damsel of beauty and goodness that would please you as well. But where a man's heart is fixed there will he turn against the counsel of wise and foolish alike."

"You speak the truth," said Arthur.

Covertly, however, Merlin warned the king that Guenever would bring trouble to his court and his heart, and counselled him to weigh well what he thought to do. But Arthur's love was warm, and the wise man's counsel, as he had said, fell like water on a stone. Thereupon Merlin went to Cameliard and told King Leodegrance of Arthur's wish.

"This is to me," said Leodegrance, "the best tidings that any man living could bring; that a monarch of such prowess and nobleness should ask to wed my daughter. Cheerfully will I give her, and I would give lands in dowry with her, but of that he has enough already. Yet I can send him a gift that will please him far more than lands or treasure, no less a gift than the Table Round, which Uther Pendragon gave me, and around which may be seated a hundred and fifty knights. As for myself, I have but a hundred

knights worthy to sit at the table, but these I will send to Arthur, who must complete the tale himself."

And so, with Guenever, and the Round Table, and the hundred knights, Merlin set out for London, where Arthur then was, and whither the noble cavalcade rode in royal procession through the land.

When King Arthur heard of their coming his heart was filled with joy, and he said to those around him,—

"This fair lady is very welcome to me, for I have loved her long. And these knights with the Round Table please me more than if the greatest riches had been sent, for I value worth and prowess far above wealth and honors."

He ordered the marriage and coronation to be prepared for in royal pomp, but with no needless delay.

"And, Merlin," he said, "I pray you to go and seek me out fifty knights of the highest honor and valor, to complete the tale of my Round Table Knights."

Merlin went, and in a short time brought twenty-eight knights whom he deemed worthy of that high honor, but no more could he find.

Then the Archbishop of Canterbury was brought, and he blessed the seats of the Round Table with great worship and ceremony, and placed the twenty-eight knights in their chairs. When this was done Merlin said,—

"Fair sirs, you must all rise and come to King Arthur and do him homage. For henceforth you are his chosen knights, and must so declare. And know you well, that great shall be the future honor and fame of all who worthily occupy these seats."

At this request the knights arose, and did homage to the king. And when they had risen from their seats there appeared in each in letters of gold the name of him who had set therein. But two seats were wanting from the full tale.

"What is the reason of this?" asked Arthur. "Why are there two seats lacking?"

"Sir," answered Merlin, "no man shall occupy those places but the most worshipful of knights. And in the Seat Perilous, which adjoins them, no man shall sit but one, and if any one unworthy of this honor shall be so hardy as to attempt it, he shall be destroyed. He that shall sit there shall have no fellow."

Anon came young Gawaine, the son of King Lot, a squire of handsome mien, who asked of the king a gift.

"Ask, and I shall grant it," answered the king.

"I ask that you make me knight on the day you wed fair Guenever."

"That shall I do willingly," said Arthur, "and with what worship I may, since you are my nephew, my sister's son."

[Here it is proper to say that Arthur had three

sisters, the daughters of Queen Igraine and her first husband, the Duke of Tintagil. One of these, Margawse, had married King Lot, and had four sons, all of whom became valiant knights; Elaine, the second, had married King Neutres of Garlot; the third sister, Morgan le Fay, had been put to school, where she became learned in the art of necromancy; of the fourth the chronicles fail to speak.]

Hardly had Gawaine spoken when there came riding into the court a poor man, who brought with him a fair-faced youth, of eighteen years of age, riding upon a lean mare.

"Sir, will you grant me a gift?" the old man asked of the king. "I was told that you would at the time of your marriage grant any gift that was asked for in reason."

"That is true," said the king. "What would you have?"

"Jesu save you, most gracious king. I ask nothing more than that you make my son a knight."

"It is a great thing you ask," said the king. "Who are you, and what claim has your son to this high honor?"

"I am but a cowherd, great sir, and am the father of thirteen sons. But this one is unlike all the rest. He will do no labor, and cares for nothing but warlike sports, and seeing knights and battles. And day and night he craves for knighthood."

"What is thy name?" the king asked the young man.

"Sir, my name is Tor."

The king looked at him closely. He was of handsome face, and was very well made and strong of limb and body.

"Where is the sword with which this youth shall be made knight?" asked the king.

"It is here," said Tor.

"Then draw it from the scabbard, and require me to make you a knight."

At these words the youth sprang lightly and gladly from his mare, drew the sword, and kneeled before the king, asking him in earnest tones to make him a Knight of the Round Table.

"A knight I will make you," answered the king. "But the Round Table is not for untried youth."

Thereupon he smote him upon the neck with the sword, and said,—

"Be you a good knight, and I pray God you may be so. If you prove of prowess and worth I promise you shall in good time have a seat at the Round Table."

"Now, Merlin," said Arthur, "tell me whether this Tor will be a good knight or not."

"He should be so," answered Merlin, "for he comes of kingly blood. The cowherd here is no more his father than I, but he is the son of the good knight, King Pellinore, whose prowess you have much reason to know."

By good hap King Pellinore himself came next

morning to the court, and was glad to find what honor had been done his son, whom he gladly acknowledged as his.

Then Merlin took Pellinore by the hand and led him to the seat next the Seat Perilous.

"This is your place at the Round Table," he said. "There is none here so worthy as yourself to sit therein."

At a later hour of that eventful day, in the city of London, and at the Church of Saint Stephen, King Arthur was wedded unto Dame Guenever, with the highest pomp and ceremony, and before as noble an assemblage of knights and ladies as the land held.

Afterward a high feast was made, and as the knights sat, each in his appointed place, at the Round Table, Merlin came to them and bade them sit still.

"For you shall see a strange and marvellous happening," he said.

Hardly had he spoken before there came running a white hart into the hall, closely followed by a white brachet,[1] while thirty couple of black hounds in full cry came after, and chased the hart round the feasting boards and then round the Round Table.

As they ran the brachet caught the hart by the haunch, and bit out a piece, whereupon the wounded animal made a great leap over a table,

[1] A small scenting dog.

and through a window, with such force as to overthrow a knight. Through the window the hounds followed, in full cry.

The fallen knight quickly rose, took up the brachet in his arms, and left the hall. Seeking his horse, he rode away, carrying the brachet with him. But hardly had he gone when a lady came riding into the hall on a white palfrey, and crying aloud to King Arthur,—

"Sir, suffer not yonder knight to do me this wrong. The brachet that he has taken away is mine."

She had but ceased speaking when an armed knight rode up on a great horse, and took her away by force, though she bitterly cried and called for aid.

"This affair must not be taken lightly," said Merlin to the king. "The honor of your court requires that you shall redress all wrongs, and here, at your marriage feast, have great wrongs been done."

"What do you advise?" asked the king. "I shall be governed by your counsel."

"Then," answered Merlin, "call Sir Gawaine, for he must bring again the white hart. Also call Sir Tor, for to him must be assigned the adventure of the knight and the brachet. As for the lady and the knight, King Pellinore must bring them, or slay the knight if he will not come."

Thereupon they were all three called, and they

armed and rode forth on the errands assigned them. Many and strange were the adventures of these valiant knights, but we have matter of more moment to tell, and so cannot relate their valorous deeds. We can but say that Gawaine brought back the head of the hart, and little honor with it, for by an evil accident he killed a lady, and barely escaped with life from her champions.

Sir Tor had better fortune, for he brought the brachet alive, and won much honor from his leeds.

King Pellinore was also successful in his quest, for he brought back the lady in safety, after having fought with and slain her kidnapper. This lady's name was Nimue, and of her we shall have many strange things to tell hereafter.

Thus ended the three quests which followed the marriage of King Arthur and Guenever the fair. Afterwards the king established his knights, giving lands to those who were poor, and enjoining all against outrage, and in favor of mercy and gentleness. He also bade them to succor all ladies in distress, and never to engage in a wrongful quarrel, or to strive for worldly goods.

Unto this were sworn all the Knights of the Round Table, old and young. And it was ordained that they should renew their oaths every year at the high feast of Pentecost, that their obligations might never be forgotten, and the honor and renown of the glorious fellowship of the Round Table never decline.

In this manner began that illustrious career of the Knights of the Round Table, which was destined to shed the greatest glory on Arthur's reign, and to fill the whole world with its fame. Valorous as were the knights who first composed that noble order of chivalry, it was afterwards to include such world-renowned warriors as Lancelot du Lake, Tristram de Lyonesse, and others of little less prowess, the story of whose noble exploits and thrilling adventures was destined to be told by bards and sung by minstrels till all time should ring with the tale, and men of honor in far future days be stirred to emulation of these worthy knights of old.

BOOK II.

THE DEEDS OF BALIN.

CHAPTER I.

HOW BALIN WON AND USED THE ENCHANTED SWORD.

It befell upon a time when King Arthur was at London, that tidings came to him that King Ryons of North Wales was carrying out his threat. He had crossed the borders with an army, and was burning and harrying his lands and slaying his people without mercy. On learning this the king sent word to his lords and knights to assemble with all haste at Camelot, where a council would be held and measures of defence and reprisal taken.

And it so fell out that while this assembly was in session at Camelot, a damsel came into the court who had been sent by the great lady Lile of Avelion. When she came before King Arthur she let fall her mantle, which was richly furred, and revealed a noble sword, with which she was girt.

"Damsel," said the king in wonder, "why wear you that sword? It beseems you not."

"Indeed, sir, it is a sore burden to me," replied the damsel, "but I must wear it till a knight of the highest honor and virtue can be found to deliver me of my charge. None other than such a one may draw this sword from its sheath, for so it is ordained. I have been to King Ryons's camp, where I was told there were knights of high excellence, and he and all his knights tried it, but in vain. I have therefore come to your court with my burden, and hope that the knight fit to draw it may here be found."

"This is surely a great marvel," said Arthur. "I shall try to draw the sword myself; not that I claim to be the best knight, but as an example to my barons."

Then Arthur took the sword by the sheath and the girdle, and pulled at it eagerly, but it failed to yield.

"You need not pull so hard," said the damsel. "He who shall draw it will need little strength, but much virtue."

"Now try ye, all my barons," said Arthur. "But beware ye be not defiled with shame, treachery, or guile."

"That is well advised," said the damsel, "for none shall draw it but a clean knight without villany, and of gentle birth both by father and mother."

Then most of the Knights of the Round Table who were there tried their fortunes, but none succeeded in the magic task.

"Alas!" said the damsel, "I hoped to find in this court the best knights upon earth."

"By my faith," said Arthur, "the world holds no better knights; but it grieves me to find that none here seem to have the grace or power to draw this sword."

It happened that at that time there was a poor knight of Northumberland birth in Arthur's court, Balin by name. He had been held prisoner there more than half a year, for slaying a knight who was cousin to the king, and had just been set free through the good services of some of the barons, who knew that he was not at fault in this deed.

When he learned what was being done his heart bade him try his fortune, but he was so poor and so shabbily dressed that he held back in shame. Yet when the damsel took her leave of Arthur and his barons, and was passing from the court, Balin called to her and said,—

"Suffer me, I pray you, to try this venture. Though I am poorly clad, and but ill considered, I feel in my heart that in honor and grace I stand as high as any of those knights."

The damsel looked on him with some disdain, and begged him not to put her to useless trouble, for he seemed not the man to succeed where so many of noble guise had failed.

"Fair damsel," he replied, "you should well know that worthiness and good qualities do not dwell in attire, but that manhood and virtue lie

hidden within man's person, not in his dress; and therefore many a worshipful knight is not known to all people."

"You speak wisely," said the damsel. "You shall essay the task, and may fortune befriend you."

Then Balin took the sword by the girdle and sheath, and drew it out with such ease that king and barons alike were filled with wonder, and many of the knights, in spite and jealousy, cried that Balin had done this not by might, but by witchcraft.

"He is a good knight," cried the damsel, "the best and worthiest among you all, even if fortune has dealt with him shabbily. Now, gentle and courteous knight, give me the sword again."

"No," said Balin, "I have fairly won this sword, and well it pleases me. I shall keep it unless it be taken from me by force."

"You are not wise to keep it," said the damsel. "I warn you that if you do so you will slay with the sword your best friend and the man you most love in the world, and that it will be your destruction."

"I shall take such adventure as God may ordain me," said Balin, "but by the faith of my body I shall keep the sword."

"You will quickly repent it," said the damsel. "It is more for your good than for mine that I ask it back. I am sad to find that you will not believe me, and will bring destruction on yourself.

The wilful man makes his own destiny." With this the damsel departed, in great sorrow.

Then Balin sent for his horse and his armor, and made ready to depart, though Arthur begged him to remain.

"I knew not your worth," he said, "or you should not have been so unkindly treated. I was misinformed concerning you."

"My heartfelt thanks are yours," said Balin. "But asking your good grace, I must needs depart."

"Then tarry not long, fair knight; you shall always be welcome to my court."

So Balin donned his armor and made ready to depart. But while he still tarried there came to the court a lady richly attired, and riding on a handsome horse.

She saluted King Arthur, and presented herself as the Lady of the Lake, from whom he had received the sword, saying that she had now come to demand the gift which he had promised her whenever she should ask for it.

"A gift I promised you, indeed," said Arthur, "and you do well to ask it. But first I would know the name of the sword you gave me."

"The name of it," said the lady, "is Excalibur, which signifies cut-steel."

"Then well is it named," said the king. "Now ask what gift you will. If it is in my power to present you shall have it."

"What I ask," said the Lady of the Lake, "is

the head of the knight who has just won the sword, or of the damsel who brought it; or both their heads, if you will. He slew my brother, and she caused my father's death."

"Truly," said the king, in pain and wonder, "you ask what I cannot in honor grant. Ask what you will else and you shall not be denied, but even a king cannot pay his debts with murder."

"I shall ask nothing else," said the lady. "Little deemed I that King Arthur would be recreant to his word."

When Balin was told of the demand of the Lady of the Lake, he went straight to her, where she stood before the king, and said, "Evil you are in heart and voice, and evil have ever been. Vile enchantress, you would have my head, and therefore shall lose yours." And with a light stroke of his sword he smote off her head before the king, so that it fell bleeding at his feet.

"What shame is this?" cried Arthur, in hot wrath. "Why have you dared treat thus a lady to whom I was beholden, and who came here under my safe-conduct?"

"Your displeasure grieves me," said Balin. "But you know not this lady, or you would not blame me for her death, for she was of all women the vilest that ever breathed. By enchantment and sorcery she has slain many good knights, and I have sought her during three years, to repay her for the falsehood and treachery by which she caused my mother to be burnt."

"Whatever your grievance, you should not have sought your revenge in my presence. You have done me a foul disgrace, sir knight. Leave my court in all haste while you may, and believe me you shall be made to repent this insult to my dignity."

Then Balin took up the head of the lady, and meeting his squire at his inn, they rode together from the town.

"Now," said the knight, "we must part. Take this head and bear it to my friends in Northumberland, and tell them that my mortal foe is dead. Also tell them that I am out of prison, and by what adventure I got this sword."

"You were greatly to blame to displease King Arthur," said the squire.

"As for that," said Balin, "I hope to win his grace again by the death or capture of King Ryons, whom I go to meet. The woman sought my death, and has had her just deserts."

"Where shall I find you again?" asked the squire.

"In King Arthur's court."

And so they parted. Meanwhile King Arthur and all the court grieved deeply over the death of the Lady of the Lake, and felt greatly shamed that they had not hindered the sudden and bloody deed. And the king ordered that she should have a rich and stately funeral.

At this time there was in Arthur's court a knight named Lanceor, the son of the king of

Ireland, a proud and valiant warrior, who was angry at Balin for winning the sword, and sought revenge on him. He asked the king to give him leave to ride after Balin and revenge the insult to his crown.

"Go and do your best," said the king. "Balin has done me a great despite, and richly deserves punishment."

Thereupon the knight of Ireland armed and rode at all speed after Balin, whom he quickly overtook on a mountain side. He called to him in loud tones,—

"Stop, sir knight. You shall halt whether you will or not, and the shield you bear shall prove but light defence to you, for I am come to punish you for your crime."

Hearing this outcry, Balin turned fiercely, and demanded,—

"What do you wish, sir knight? Are you here to joust with me?"

"It is for that I have followed you," said the Irish knight.

"It might have been better for you to stay at home," answered Balin. "Many a knight who thinks to chastise his enemy finds ill fortune to fall upon himself. From what court have you been sent?"

"From the court of King Arthur, to revenge the insult you put upon him in murdering his guest before his face."

"Then must I fight with you," said Balin.

"Yet I warn you your quarrel is a weak one. The lady that is dead richly deserved her fate, or I should have been as loath as any knight living to kill a woman."

"Make ready," said Lanceor. "Fight we must, and one of us shall remain dead upon this field. Our combat is to the utterance."

Then they put their spears in rest, and rode together at the full speed of their horses, meeting with a shock in mid career. Lanceor struck Balin a blow upon the shield that shivered the spear in his hand. But Balin smote him with such force that the spear-point went through shield and hauberk, and pierced his body, so that he fell dead to the earth.

As the victorious knight stood looking on the corpse of his slain foe, there came from Camelot a damsel, who rode up at full speed upon a fair palfrey. When she saw that Lanceor was dead she fell into a passion of sorrow, and cried out in tones of deep lamentation,—

"Oh, Balin, thou hast slain two bodies and one heart! Yes, two hearts in one body, and two souls thou hast murdered with thy fatal spear."

Then she took the sword from her love, and as she took it fell to the ground in a swoon. When she arose again her sorrow was so great that Balin was grieved to the heart, and he sought to take the sword from her hands, but she held it so firmly that he could not wrest it from her without hurting her. Suddenly, before he could move to

hinder, she set the pommel of the sword to the ground and threw her body upon the naked blade. Pierced through the heart, she fell dead upon the body of her slain love.

"Alas!" said Balin, "that this should have happened. I deeply regret the death of this knight for the love of this damsel; for such true love as this I never saw before. Yet his death was forced on me, and hers I could not hinder."

Full of sorrow, he turned his horse, and as he looked towards a great forest near by he saw a knight riding towards him, whom he knew, by his arms, to be his brother Balan.

When they were met they took off their helmets and kissed each other, and wept for joy and pity.

"I little expected to meet you thus," said Balan. "A man in the Castle of Four Stones told me that you were freed from prison, and therefore I came hither in hope to find you at the court."

Then Balin told his brother of all that had happened at Camelot, and of the displeasure of the king, and that he had determined to win Arthur's favor at the risk of his life.

"King Ryons lies not far away besieging the castle Terrabil," he said. "Thither will we ride, to prove our worth and prowess upon him."

"I shall be your comrade," said Balan. "We shall help each other as brethren should, and trust to God for fortune."

As they stood conversing there came a dwarf

riding in all haste from Camelot. When he saw the dead bodies he tore his hair for sorrow.

"Which of you knights has done this foul deed?" he demanded.

"Why do you ask?" queried Balin.

"Because I have the right to know."

"It was I," said Balin. "He pursued me hither, and forced me to fight. One of us had to die. As for the damsel, she died by her own hand, for which no man can be sorrier than I. For her sake I shall owe all women the better love and favor."

"You have done yourself great damage," said the dwarf. "The kindred of this knight will follow you through the world till they have revenged on you his death."

"That I do not greatly dread," said Balin. "But I am sorry to have displeased King Arthur for the death of this knight; and sorrier still for the fate of this lovelorn damsel."

As they thus talked there chanced to pass a king of Cornwall, named King Mark, who halted on seeing the dead bodies, and demanded what had been done. When the tale was told him he was grieved that true love should have met so sad a fate, and said, "I shall not leave here till I have built them a tomb, for they have earned a rich interment."

Then he pitched his tents, and buried them nobly, placing above them a rich and fair tomb which he found in a church near by, and upon this tomb he wrote their epitaph, as follows:

"Here lieth Lanceor, the son of Ireland's king, who was slain in fair combat by the hands of Balin; and his lady Colombe, who for deep love and sorrow slew herself with her true love's sword. May lovers henceforth make this their place of pilgrimage."

CHAPTER II.

HOW ARTHUR TRIUMPHED OVER THE KINGS.

While the tomb was being erected over the dead knight and his love, Merlin appeared at the scene.

"You have done yourself great harm," he said to Balin. "Why saved you not this lady?"

"By the faith of my body, I could not," said Balin, "she slew herself so suddenly."

"This must I tell you," said Merlin. "Because of the death of this lady you shall strike a stroke the most dolorous that ever man struck, except the stroke of our Lord; for you shall hurt the truest knight and the man of most worship that now lives, and through that stroke three kingdoms shall be in great poverty, misery, and wretchedness for twelve years, and the knight you will hurt shall not be whole of his wound for many years."

"If I knew that it were true as you say," an-

swered Balin, "I would do such a rash deed as to slay myself to make you a liar. But the future must reveal itself. I trust no man's predictions."

Thereupon Merlin suddenly vanished away, leaving them in deep marvel at his coming and going. Soon after Balin and his brother took leave of King Mark.

"First," said the king, "tell me your name."

"You see he bears two swords," said Balan. "You may call him the knight with the two swords."

And so King Mark rode towards Camelot, and the brothers towards Terrabil. As they rode, Merlin again met them, but now in disguise.

"Whither do you ride?" he asked.

"Why should we tell you that?" said the knights.

"You need not, for I know already. And I can tell you this. You will gain no advantage over King Ryons without my counsel."

"Ah! you are Merlin," said Balin. "Then we shall be glad of your counsel."

"Come then with me. But look that you brace yourself to knightly deeds, for you will have great need to do so."

"As for that," said Balin, "we will do what we can. No knight can do more."

Then Merlin lodged them in a leafy wood beside the highway, where they rested till it was near midnight. He then awakened them and bade them rise and make ready, for the king they

sought was near at hand. He had stolen away from his host with threescore of his best knights, to visit a lady.

"How shall we know the king?" asked Balin.

"Hereby is a narrow way where you shall meet him," said Merlin.

They followed him to the place, where they lay in ambush till the rattle of harness showed that the party approached. Then, at Merlin's suggestion, the two knights rode from their covert and assailed the king at the head of his followers, wounding him sorely and hurling him to the ground. They then, in the darkness, attacked the array of knights with the fury of lions, slaying more than forty of them, and putting the remnant to flight.

This done, they returned to King Ryons where he lay helpless, and with a threat of death forced him to yield himself to their grace.

"Valiant knights, slay me not," he asked. "You may profit by my life, but can win nothing by my death."

"There you speak truly," said they, and lifting him carefully they placed him on a horse-litter for conveyance to Camelot.

Then Merlin vanished and came to King Arthur, whom he told that his greatest enemy was vanquished and taken.

"By whom?" asked the king.

"By two of the most valorous knights in your realm. To-morrow you shall learn who they are."

In good time Balin and his brother came with the wounded king and delivered him to the porters at the gates, charging them to bear him to King Arthur. Then they turned again and departed in the dawning of the day.

When King Ryons was brought to the court, Arthur received him graciously.

"Sir king," he said, "you are heartily welcome. By what adventure came you hither?"

"By a hard one," said the captive, "as you well may see."

"Who won you?" asked Arthur.

"The knight with the two swords and his brother," said Ryons. "And knights of marvellous prowess they are."

"I know them not," said Arthur, "but none the less am I deeply beholden to them."

"I shall tell you," said Merlin. "One of these knights was Balin, he that won the sword; the other was Balan, his brother, and as good a knight. And it is the most sorrowful thing that tongue can say that neither of these brave knights shall live long to win the fame of which they are so worthy."

"Alas!" said Arthur, "if that be so, it is indeed a great pity. I am much beholden to Balin, for he has highly redeemed the despite he did me. I have not deserved such good service at his hands."

"He shall do more for you, and that soon," said Merlin. "I must now depart, for I have

duties elsewhere; but before I go let me warn you to prepare your forces for battle at once. To-morrow before noon you will be set upon by a great host, led by Nero, King Ryons's brother. Therefore make all haste for your defence."

Merlin's departure was for a purpose which he told not to the king. He well knew that King Lot of Orkney, Arthur's bitterest foe, was marching to join Nero with a powerful host, and foresaw that if they fell together on King Arthur he and all his army would be destroyed. The shrewd magician thereupon repaired to King Lot, and held him with idle tales of prophecy till Nero and his people were destroyed.

For between Nero and Arthur a vigorous battle was fought, in which many knights won honor and renown, while King Arthur with his own hand slew twenty knights and maimed forty. But Balin and his brother Balan, who came in during the fight, did such mighty deeds of prowess that all who beheld them said they fought like angels from heaven or devils from hell, while Arthur beheld their prowess with wonder and delight, and vowed that he owed to them his victory.

The combat, which took place at the Castle Terrabil, ended in the complete defeat of Nero, and the destruction of nearly all his host. Word of this disaster was brought to King Lot, where he lay resting with his army.

"Alas!" he said, "why did I let myself be

beguiled? Had I been there no host under heaven could have matched us. That false prattler, with his prophecy, has mocked and befooled me. But what shall now be done? Shall we treat with Arthur, or is it wise to fight him with half an army?"

"His men are weary with fighting and we are fresh," said a knight. "Now is the time to set upon him."

"So be it, then. And I hope that every knight will bear himself in the fray as well as I, for it is no laggard's task we have now before us."

Then with waving banners and serried spears they assailed Arthur's weary host. But the Round Table Knights, with the aid of the two valiant brothers Balin and Balan, roused themselves vigorously to the fray, and bore all before them, so that only where King Lot himself fought did his host hold its ground. But where he battled in the van all his men seemed borne up by his valor, and not a knight met him but was overthrown or forced back by his prowess.

Then King Pellinore pushed through the press of knights and horses, and struck a mighty stroke at King Lot as he fought at the head of his host. The sword failed in its aim, but struck the neck of the king's horse, so that the wounded animal fell to the ground with its rider. Then Pellinore struck so furious a stroke that his sword cut King Lot's helmet in twain, and cleft his head to the brows, hurling him lifeless to the earth.

Seeing their king thus slain, all the host of Orkney turned and fled, and great was the slaughter in the pursuit. That day there fell in all twelve kings, who fought with Lot and Nero, and all these were buried in the church of Saint Stevens at Camelot.

Of the tombs that were made for these kings that of King Lot was most richly adorned, and King Arthur had a tomb prepared for himself beside it. For this he had made twelve images of brass and copper, which were gilt with gold. These represented the twelve kings, and each of them held a taper of wax, that burned night and day. An image of King Arthur was also made, in the form of a statue that stood above the twelve kings with a drawn sword in its hand, while the faces of the twelve images were those of men that had been overcome. All these figures were made by Merlin through his subtle craft.

"When I am dead," he said to the king, "these tapers shall burn no longer. Then the end will be near, and the adventures of the Sangreal shall be achieved."

Much more he told the king of the strange events that would come to pass in the future time; and further he said,—

"Look well to the scabbard of Excalibur. You shall lose no blood while you wear this scabbard, even though you be covered with wounds."

Thus admonished, Arthur, in loving trust, took the scabbard to Morgan le Fay, his sister, and

gave it into her care to keep for him. Much did he peril in doing so, for Morgan was false at heart, and proved recreant to her trust, from love for a knight named Accolan, whom she cherished in her soul beyond her husband, while she had grown to hate her brother. She made, by enchantment, another scabbard like the one given her in trust, and gave the scabbard of Excalibur to her love. By this deed of treachery she hoped in her false soul to bring King Arthur to his death. And well-nigh she succeeded therein, as shall be told hereafter.

CHAPTER III.

HOW BALIN GAVE THE DOLOROUS STROKE.

A DAY or two after King Arthur had placed the magical scabbard in the hands of his evil-thinking sister, he grew unwell, and had his tent pitched in a meadow near Camelot for the benefit of the fresh air and the green verdure. Here he sought in vain to sleep, laying long in uneasy wakefulness. As he thus lay he heard a horse approaching, and looking through the door of his tent, beheld a knight, who lamented deeply as he came.

"Halt! fair sir," cried Arthur. "Tell me the cause of your sorrow."

"You can little aid me," said the knight, and he rode onward without further answer.

Soon afterward Balin rode up, and on seeing King Arthur sprang from his horse and saluted him.

"By my head, you are welcome," said the king. "A knight has just ridden past here moaning sadly, but has declined to tell me the cause of his sorrow. I desire of your courtesy to bring that knight to me, either by force or good-will, for I wish greatly to know why he so deeply grieves."

"That is little to what I should be glad to do for you," said Balin. He rode on apace, and ere long found the knight in a neighboring forest in company with a damsel.

"Sir knight," he said, "you must come with me to King Arthur. He demands to see you and learn the cause of your sorrow."

"That I shall not do," said the knight. "It will injure me greatly, and do no good to you or him."

"Then you must make ready to fight," said Balin. "I have my order to bring you willingly or by force, and I should be loath to have to fight with you."

"Will you be my warrant if I go with you?" asked the knight. "For truly you lead me into danger."

"Yes. And I shall die rather than let you come to harm, if it is in my power to avert it."

This said, the knight turned and rode back with Balin, accompanied by the damsel. But as they

reached King Arthur's pavilion a strange thing happened. A spear was thrust through the body of the knight, inflicting a mortal wound. Yet the hand and form of him who did this fatal deed remained unseen.

"Alas!" said the knight, "it is as I feared. Under your conduct and guard I have been slain by a traitorous knight called Garlon, who through enchantment rides invisible, and does such deeds as this. My day is done. As you are a true knight, I charge you to take my horse, which is better than yours, and ride with this damsel on the quest which for me is at an end. Follow as she will lead, and revenge my death when best you may."

"That shall I do," said Balin. "Upon the honor of knighthood I vow to follow your quest, and to revenge you on this false foe, or die as you have done."

Then, leaving the king, Balin rode with the damsel, who bore with her the truncheon of the spear with which the knight had been killed. After they had gone, King Arthur had the knight buried richly and honorably, and had written upon the tomb his name, Herleus de Berbeus, and how he came to his death through the treachery of the invisible knight Garlon.

Meanwhile Balin and the damsel rode onward until they found themselves in a forest. Here they met a knight engaged in hunting, who asked Balin why he showed such grief.

"That I do not care to tell," said Balin.

"You should if I were armed as you are, for your answer is too curt to be courteous."

"My story is not worth fighting for," answered Balin. "I will tell you if you so greatly desire to know." He thereupon told him the fatal event which had just occurred, and that he mourned the untimely death of the knight who had been so treacherously slain.

"This is a sad story," said the knight. "As I am a true cavalier I will go with you on your quest, and leave you not while life lasts."

Then he went with Balin to his inn, armed himself, and rode forth with him. But as they passed by a hermitage near a churchyard the invisible knight Garlon came again, and smote Balin's companion through the body, as he had done to Herleus before.

"Alas!" cried the knight. "I too am slain by this invisible traitor, who does murder at will under cover of enchantment."

"It is not the first despite the wretch has done me," cried Balin. "Could I see him I would soon repay this outrage. I am bound by the honor of a knight to a double revenge on this unworthy caitiff."

He and the hermit thereupon buried the slain knight, Perin de Mountbeliard, under a rich stone in a noble tomb, inscribing thereon the cause of his death.

In the morning the knight and damsel proceeded

on their quest, and in good time found themselves before a castle, which rose high and broad by the roadside. Here Balin alighted, and he and the damsel turned towards the castle, with purpose to enter. But as Balin entered in advance the portcullis was suddenly let fall behind him, cutting him off from his companion. Immediately a number of men assailed the damsel with drawn swords.

When Balin saw this treacherous proceeding his soul burned within him. What to do at first he knew not. Then he ran hastily into the gate tower, and leaped, all armed, over the wall into the ditch. Finding himself unhurt, he drew his sword and rushed furiously upon the armed men who surrounded his companion.

"Traitors and dogs!" he cried. "If you are eager for fight, I will give you your fill."

"We cannot fight you," they answered. "We do nothing but keep the old custom of the castle."

"What is that?" asked Balin. "It is an ill custom, methinks, that thus displays itself."

"Our lady is sick, and has lain so for many years. Nothing will cure her but a dish full of blood from a maid and a king's daughter. It is, therefore, the custom that no damsel shall pass this way without leaving a silver dish full of blood."

"That is for the damsel to say," replied Balin. "If she chooses to bleed for the good of your lady she may, but her life shall not be taken while mine lasts."

The damsel thereupon yielded a dish full of her blood, but it helped not the lady. She and Balin rested in the castle for the night, where they had good cheer. In the morning they proceeded again on their quest.

Three or four days now passed without adventure. At the end of that time the knight and damsel found lodging in the house of a rich gentleman, the owner of a fair estate. As they sat at supper Balin was moved by the grievous complaints of one who sat beside him, and asked his host the cause of this lamentation.

"It is this," said the host. "I was lately at a tournament, where I twice overthrew a knight who is brother to King Pellam. He threatened to revenge his defeat on my best friend, and has done so by wounding my son. The hurt is a grievous one, and cannot be cured till I have some of that knight's blood; but how to find him I know not, for his name is unknown to me, and he always rides invisible."

"Aha!" cried Balin, "has that treacherous dog been at his murderous work again? I know his name well. It is Garlon, and he has lately slain two knightly companions of mine in the same base manner. I should rather meet with that invisible wretch than have all the gold in this kingdom. Let me see him once and he or I dies."

"I shall tell you what to do, then," said the host. "King Pellam of Listeneise has announced a great feast, to be given within twenty days, to

which no knight can come unless he brings with him his wife or his love. That false knight, your enemy and mine, will be there, and visible to human eyes."

"Then, as I am a true knight," cried Balin, "you shall have of his blood enough to twice heal your son's wound, if I die in the getting it."

"We shall set forward to-morrow," said the host, "and I hope it may be as you say."

In the morning they rode towards Listeneise, which it took them fifteen days to reach, and where the great feast began on the day of their arrival. Leaving their horses in the stables, they sought to enter the castle, but Balin's companion was refused admittance, as he had no lady with him. Balin, however, having the damsel with him, was at once received, and taken to a chamber where he laid aside his armor and put on rich robes which the attendants brought him. They wished him to leave his sword, but to this he objected.

"It is the custom of my country," he said, "for a knight always to keep his weapon with him. This custom shall I keep, or depart as I came."

Hearing this, they objected no longer to his wearing his sword, and he thereupon entered the feasting chambers with his lady companion. Here he found himself among many worshipful knights and fair ladies.

Balin, after looking carefully round him, asked a guest,—

"Is there not a knight in this good company named Garlon?"

"Yes. Yonder knight is he, the one with the dark face. And let me tell you that there is no more marvellous knight living. He has the power of going invisible, and has destroyed many good knights unseen."

"I have heard of this," said Balin. "A marvellous gift, indeed. This, then, is Garlon? Thanks for your information."

Then Balin considered anxiously what had best be done. "If I slay him here my own life will pay the forfeit," he said to himself. "But if I let him escape me now it may be long before I have such an opportunity, and in the meanwhile he may do much harm."

As he stood thus reflecting, with his eyes fixed on Garlon's face, the latter observed his close and stern regard. In haughty anger he came to him and smote him on the face with the back of his hand.

"Sir knight," he said, "take that for your impertinent stare. Now eat your meat, and do what you came here for. Hereafter learn to use your eyes to better purpose."

"You dog!" cried Balin, "this is not your first insult to me. You bid me do what I came for. It is this." As he spoke he rose furiously from his seat, drew his sword, and with one fierce blow clove Garlon's head to the shoulders.

"That is my errand here," cried Balin to the

guests. "Now give me the truncheon," he said to the damsel, "with which he slew your knight."

She gave it to him, and Balin thrust it through Garlon's body, exclaiming,—

"With that truncheon you killed a good knight, and with this blow I revenge him."

Then he called his late host, who had by this gained entrance to the feast, and said,—

"Here lies your foe. Take with you enough of his blood to heal your son."

All this had happened so quickly that none had time to interfere, but the knights now sprang nastily from their seats, and rushed from the hall for their weapons, that they might revenge their slain companion. Among them rose King Pellam, crying furiously,—

"Why have you killed my brother! Villain and murderer, you shall die for this!"

"Here I stand," said Balin. "If you wish revenge, seek it yourself. I stand in my defence."

"It is well said," cried the king. "Stand back, all. For the love I bore my brother I will take his revenge on myself. Let no one interfere. This murderer is mine."

Then King Pellam snatched up a mighty weapon and struck fiercely at Balin, who threw up his own sword in guard. He was in time to save his head, but the treacherous blade went into pieces beneath the stroke, leaving him unarmed before the furious king.

Balin, finding himself thus in danger of death,

ran into a neighboring chamber in search of a weapon, closely pursued by his enraged adversary. Finding none there, he ran on from chamber to chamber, seeking a weapon in vain, with King Pellam raging like a maddened lion behind him.

At length Balin entered a rich and marvellously adorned chamber, within which was a bed covered with cloth of gold of the noblest texture, and in this bed a person lay. Near by was a table with a top of solid gold and four curiously-shaped pillars of silver for its legs, while upon it stood a mighty spear, whose handle was strangely wrought, as though it had been made for a mighty king.

But of all this marvel and magnificence Balin saw only the spear, which he seized at once with a strong grip, and turned with it to face his adversary. King Pellam was close at hand, with sword uplifted for a fatal stroke, but as he rushed in blind rage forward Balin pierced his body with the spear, hurling him insensible to the floor.

Little dreamed the fated warrior of all that thrust portended. The spear he used was a magical weapon, and prophecy had long declared that the deadliest evil should come from its use. King Pellam had no sooner fallen beneath that fatal thrust than all the castle rocked and tottered as if a mighty earthquake had passed beneath its walls, and the air was filled with direful sounds. Then down crushed the massive roof, and with a sound like that of the trumpet-blast of disaster

the strong walls rent asunder, and rushed downward in a torrent of ruin. One moment that stately pile lifted its proud battlements in majesty toward the skies; the next it lay prostrate as though it had been stricken by the hand of God to the earth.

Men say who saw it that when fell that fatal blow—thereafter to be known in history and legend as the "dolorous stroke"—the castle shivered like a forest struck by a strong wind, and then fell with a mighty crash, burying hundreds beneath its walls. Among these were Balin and King Pellam, who lay there for three days without aid or relief, in deep agony and peril of death.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FATE OF BALIN AND BALAN.

At the end of the three days came Merlin, who rescued Balin from under the ruined walls.

"Your horse is dead," he said, "but I have brought you another, and the sword you won in Arthur's hall. My counsel is that you ride out of this country with all speed; for little you know the evil you have done."

"The damsel I brought hither must go with me," said Balin.

"She shall never go farther," answered Merlin.

"The damsel is dead, and with her many a good knight and fair lady. That blow of yours was the fatalest ever struck, as you may see in the ruin of this castle, and as you will see further when you ride abroad through this distracted country."

"What have I done?" cried Balin. "How could I know that such dread disaster dwelt within that spear? Who was he that lay within the bed, and what does this strange thing portend?"

"You did but what destiny commanded," said Merlin. "It is fate, not you, that is at fault. Let me tell you the meaning of this mighty and terrible event, which destiny has thrown into your hands. He who lay in that rich bed was Joseph of Arimathea, who came years ago into this land, and bore with him part of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. And that spear was the same fatal weapon with which Longius smote our Lord to the heart. King Pellam was nigh akin to Joseph of Arimathea, and great pity is it of his hurt, for that stroke has filled the land with trouble, grief, and mourning. As for King Pellam, he shall lie for many years in sore pain from the wound you dealt him, and shall never be whole again until Galahad, the high prince, shall heal him when he comes this way in the quest of the Sangreal."

These words said, Balin mounted his horse, and departed in deep grief for the harm he had wrought, saying to Merlin as he left, "In this world we shall never meet again, for I feel that destiny has marked me for its victim." But little

knew he the full effects of that fatal blow till he rode forth through the land. Then as he went through the once fair cities and fertile country he saw the people lying dead on every side, and cities and lands in ruin together. Few remained alive of all the inhabitants of that populous realm, and as he passed these cried out to him,—

"Oh, Balin, terrible is the harm that thou hast done to this innocent land! Three countries lie destroyed through the dolorous stroke thou gavest unto King Pellam. Woe to thee for this dread deed! Thou hast escaped alive, yet doubt not but the vengeance of heaven will fall on thee at last!"

Great was the grief and suffering with which the good knight heard these words, and glad at heart was he when at length he left behind him that land of woe and ruin, to which his innocent hand had wrought such deadly harm.

But as he rode onward the feeling came to him that his end was at hand, though this grieved him little, for he felt as one set apart to do heaven's work of destiny. And for eight days thereafter he rode over many leagues of strange country without adventure.

At length came a day when he saw before him, by the roadside, a cross, on which in letters of gold was written, "It is not wise for any knight alone to ride towards this castle." Then he saw a white-haired old man approach, who said,—

"Balin le Savage, you pass your bounds to come

this way. Turn again, if you would leave this place in safety."

With these words he vanished, and as he did so there rang on the air a bugle-blast like that blown for the death of a beast of the chase.

"That blast is blown for me," said Balin. "I am the prize of the invisible powers. I am not yet dead, but they claim me for their own."

As he stood lost in deep thought there came trooping from the castle, which he now saw in the distance, a hundred fair ladies and many knights, who welcomed him with great show of gladness, and led him with them to the castle, where he found dancing and minstrelsy, and all manner of sport and pleasure. As he stood observing all this the chief lady of the castle said to him,—

"Knight of the two swords, there is a custom of this castle which all who come here must keep. Hereby is an island which is held by a knight, and no man can pass this way unless he joust with him."

"That is an unhappy custom," said Balin. "Why should every traveller be forced to fight?"

"You shall have to do with but one knight," said the lady.

"That troubles me little," said Balin. "I and my horse are both weary from our journey, but I am not weary at heart, and, if fight I must, I am ready to do it now. If death comes to me, it will not come unwelcome."

"Your shield does not seem to be a good one," said a knight. "Let me lend you a larger one."

Balin took the proffered shield and left his own, and rode to the island, where he and his horse were taken over in a great boat. On reaching the island shore he met a damsel, who said in sorrowful accents,—

"O Knight Balin, why have you left your own shield? Alas! you have put yourself in great danger. Had you borne your own you would have been known. It is a great pity that a knight of your prowess and hardiness should fight unknown."

"I repent that I ever came into this country," said Balin. "But now that I am here I shall not turn again, and whatever comes to me, be it life or death, I shall take it as my lot."

Then he mounted and rode into the island, in whose midst he saw a castle, from which rode a knight wearing red armor, and mounted on a horse which bore trappings of the same color. The warriors looked at each other, but neither knew the other, though the two swords that Balin wore should have revealed him, had not he borne a shield of strange device.

Then, coushing their spears, the hostile knights rode together at the full speed of their war-horses, meeting with such mighty force and equal fortune that both horses went down, and both knights were hurled to the earth, where they lay in a swoon.

Balin was sorely bruised and weary with travel and the red knight was the first to gain his feet. But as he advanced with drawn sword, Balin sprang up and met him with ready shield, returning his blow with such force that he cut through his shield and cleft his helmet.

And now began the mightiest battle that island had ever beheld. As they fought, Balin looked at the castle and saw that its towers were full of ladies who were watching the deadly contest, and who applauded each blow as though this combat was meant for their sport. The valiant knights fought till their breath failed, and then took rest and fought again, until each was sorely wounded and the spot upon which they stood was deeply stained with blood.

They fought on until each of them had seven great wounds, the least of which might have brought death to the mightiest giant of the world. But still the terrible sword-play continued, until their coats of mail were so hewn that they stood unarmed, and the blood poured piteously from their veins. At length the red knight withdrew a little and lay down. Then said Balin,—

"Tell me what knight you are. For never did I meet a man of your prowess before."

"I am Balan," was the answer, "brother to the good knight Balin."

"Alas!" cried Balin, "that ever I should see this day!" and he fell to the earth in a swoon.

Then Balan dragged himself up on his hands

and feet, and took off his brother's helmet, but the face was so scarred and blood-stained that he did not know it. But when Balin came to himself he cried,—

"Oh, Balan, my brother, thou hast slain me, and I thee! Fate has done deadly work this day."

"Heaven aid me!" cried Balan. "I should have known you by your two swords, but your shield deceived me."

"A knight in the castle caused me to leave my own shield," said Balin. "If I had life enough left me I would destroy that castle for its evil customs."

"And I should aid you," said Balan. "They have held me here because I happened to slay a knight that kept this island. And if you had slain me and lived, you would have been held in the same way as their champion."

As they thus conversed there came to them the lady of the castle, with four knights and six ladies and as many yeomen. The lady wept as she heard them moan that they as brothers had slain each other, and she promised them that they should be richly entombed on the spot in which the battle had been fought.

"Now will you send for a priest," asked Balan, "that we may receive the sacrament?"

"It shall be done," said the lady.

And so she sent for a priest and gave them the rites of the church.

"When we are buried in one tomb," said Balin, "and the inscription is placed over us telling how two brothers here slew each other in ignorance and valor, there will never good knight nor good man see our tomb but they will pray for our souls, and bemoan our fate."

At this all the ladies wept for pity. Soon after Balan died, but Balin lived till midnight. The lady thereupon had them both richly buried, and the tomb inscribed as they had asked, though she knew not Balin's name.

But in the morning came the magician Merlin, who wrote Balin's name upon the tomb in letters of gold, as follows: "Here lieth Balin le Savage, the knight with the two swords, and he that smote the Dolorous Stroke."

More than this did Merlin, through his magic art. In that castle he placed a bed, and ordained that whoever should lie therein would lose his wits. And he took the sword which Balin had won from the damsel, and removed its pommel, placing upon it another pommel. Then he asked a knight beside him to lift that sword, but he tried to do so in vain.

"No man shall have power to handle that sword," said Merlin, "but the best knight in the world; and that shall be Sir Launcelot, or his son Sir Galahad. And Launcelot with this sword shall slay Sir Gawaine, the man he loves best in the world." All this he wrote in the pommel of the sword.

Then Merlin built to the island a bridge of steel and iron that was but half a foot broad, and ordained that no man should cross that bridge unless he were of virtuous life and free from treachery or evil thoughts and deeds.

This done, Merlin by magical skill fixed Balin's sword in a block of marble as great as a millstone, and set it afloat upon the stream in such a way that the sword always stood upright above the water. And for years this stone swam down the stream, for no man could take it from the water or draw the sword, until in time it came to the city of Camelot (which is in English Winchester), where the sword was drawn, and many strange things followed thereupon, as shall be hereafter related.

Soon after this was done, Merlin came to King Arthur and told him the story of the dolorous stroke which Balin had given to King Pellam, and of the marvellous battle Balin and Balan had fought, and how they were buried in one tomb.

"Alas!" cried Arthur, "I never heard a sadder tale. And much is the loss to knighthood and chivalry, for in the world I know not two such knights."

Thus endeth the tale of Balin and Balan, two brethren born in Northumberland, good knights.

CHAPTER V.

MERLIN'S FOLLY AND FATE.

And now we have again a tale of disaster to tell, namely, how Merlin the wise fell into love's dotage, and through folly brought himself to a living death, so that thenceforth he appeared no more upon the earth, and his wise counsels were lost to Arthur and his knights.

For the old magician, who had so long kept free from love's folly, became besotted with the damsel named Nimue, she whom King Pellinore had brought to the court on his quest at Arthur's marriage.

Merlin quite lost his wits and wisdom through his mad passion for this young lady, to whom he would give no rest, but followed her wherever she went. The shrewd damsel, indeed, encouraged her doting lover, for he was ready to teach her all the secrets of his art, so that in time she learned from him so much of his craft that she became skilled in necromancy beyond all the enchantresses of her time.

The wise magician knew well that his end was at hand, and that the woman whom he loved would prove his ruin, but his doting passion was such that he had no strength of mind to resist. He came thereupon unto King Arthur, and told him what he foresaw, and which it was not in his

power to prevent; and warned him of many coming events, that he might be prepared for them when Merlin was with him no more.

"I have charged you," he said, "to keep in your own hands the sword Excalibur and its scabbard, yet well I know that both sword and scabbard will be stolen from you by a woman whom you foolishly trust, and that your lack of wisdom will bring you near to your death. This also I may say, you will miss me deeply. When I am gone you would give all your lands to have me again. For Merlin will find no equal in the land."

"That I well know already," said the king. "But, since you foresee so fully what is coming upon you, why not provide for it, and by your craft overcome it?"

"No," said Merlin, "that may not be. Strong I am, but destiny is stronger. There is no magic that can set aside the decrees of fate."

Soon afterwards the damsel departed from the court, but her doting old lover followed her wherever she went. And as he sought to practise upon her some of his subtle arts, she made him swear, if he would have her respond to his love, never to perform enchantment upon her again.

This Merlin swore. Then he and Nimue crossed the sea to the land of Benwick, the realm of King Ban, who had helped King Arthur so nobly in his wars, and here he saw young Lancelot, the son of King Ban and his wife Elaine, who was in the time to come to win world-wide fame.

The queen lamented bitterly to Merlin the mortal war which King Claudas made upon her lord and his lands, and the ruin that she feared.

"Be not disturbed thereby," said Merlin. "Your son Lancelot shall revenge you upon King Claudas, so that all Christendom shall ring with the story of his exploits. And this same youth shall become the most famous knight in the world."

"O Merlin!" said the queen, "shall I live to see my son a man of such prowess?"

"Yes, my lady and queen, this you shall see, and live many years to enjoy his fame."

Soon afterwards Merlin and his lady-love returned to England and came to Cornwall, the magician showing her many wonders of his art as they journeyed. But he pressed her so for her love that she grew sorely weary of his importunate suit, and would have given aught less than her life to be rid of him, for she feared him as one possessed of the arts of the foul fiend. But say or do what she would, her doting lover clung to her all the more devotedly, and wearied her the more with his endless tale of love.

Then it came to pass that as they wandered through Cornwall, and Merlin showed her all the wonders of that land, they found themselves by a rocky steep, under which he told her was a wonderful cavern that had been wrought by enchantment in the solid rock, its mouth being closed by a mighty mass of stone.

Here, with all her art of love, and a subtle show

of affection, the faithless damsel so bewitched Merlin that for joy he knew not what he did; and at her earnest wish he removed by his craft the stone that sealed the cavern's mouth, and went under it that he might show her all the marvels that lay there concealed.

But hardly had he entered when, using the magic arts which she had learned from him, the faithless woman caused the great stone to sink back with a mighty sound into its place, shutting up the enchanter so firmly in that underground cavern that with all his craft he could never escape. For he had taught her his strongest arts of magic, and do what he would he could never move that stone.

This faithless act performed, the damsel departed and left Merlin a prisoner in the rock. She alone of all the world could set him free, and that she would not do, but kept her secret, and thanked heaven for her deliverance.

And so Merlin, through his doting folly, passed out of the world of men into a living tomb.

Long days and months passed before his fate was known, and then chance brought to his cavern prison a valiant knight named Bagdemagus, who had left Arthur's court in anger because Sir Tor was given a vacant seat at the Round Table which he claimed as his due.

As he wandered through that part of Cornwall in quest of adventures, he came one day past a great rock, from which dire lamentations seemed

to issue. Hearing those woeful sounds, Bagdemagus sought to remove the stone that closed the cavern's mouth, but so firmly was it fixed by enchantment that a hundred men could not have stirred it from its place.

"Strive no longer," came a voice from within. "You labor in vain."

"Who is it that speaks?" asked the knight.

"I am Merlin, the enchanter; brought here by my doting folly. I loved not wisely but too well; and here you find me, locked in this cliff by my strongest spells, which in love's witlessness I taught to a woman traitor. Go now, worthy sir, and leave me to my fate."

"Alas! that this should be! Tell me who did this thing, and by what dismal chance, that I may tell the king."

Then Merlin related the story of his folly and fate, in the end bidding the knight to leave him. for only death could free him from that prison.

Hearing this, Bagdemagus departed, full of sorrow and wonder, and after many days returned to Arthur's court, where he told the story of the magician's fate. Great was the marvel of all and the grief of the king on learning this, and much he besought Nimue to set Merlin free. But neither threats nor entreaties could move her obdurate heart, and at length she left the court in anger and defiance, vowing that she would never set free her old tormentor.

BOOK III.

THE TREASON OF MORGAN LE FAY.

CHAPTER I.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE ENCHANTED SHIP.

On a day not long after the event of Balin's death, it befell that Arthur and many of his knights went out hunting in a great forest, where, as fortune willed, King Arthur, Sir Accolan of Gaul, and King Uriens, who had wedded Morgan le Fay, followed far on the track of a great hart, which led them astray till they were ten miles distant from their late companions.

They were all well mounted, but so hot was the chase, and so far did it lead them, that the horses at length fell dead beneath the ardent huntsmen, leaving them on foot in the remote depths of the forest. But the hart was in no better condition, for the hot chase had worn it out, and it dragged wearily on before them, barely able to keep its feet.

"What shall we do?" said Arthur. "We are far from human habitation, and the night comes fast upon us."

"Let us go forward on foot," said Uriens. "We shall surely soon meet with some place of shelter."

Taking this advice, they advanced in the track of the hart, and soon came up with it where it lay on the bank of a large stream, while a hound had it by the throat, and others were coming up in full bay.

Then Arthur blew the death-note of the chase, and killed the hart. This done, he looked about him, and to his surprise saw approaching on the stream a small vessel, with flowing sails of silk. As it came near it veered towards the shore, and finally touched land on the sands before them. Arthur walked to the bank and looked over the sides upon the deck, but to his wonder not a living person was to be seen.

"This is a marvellous thing," said the king. "Has the vessel been blown here by a wind of magic? Let us enter and see what is in the ship."

They did so, and found it richly adorned with silken hangings and royally equipped. As they stood on the deck looking about them in surprise, night came upon them, but suddenly the darkness was dispelled by a hundred torches, which flared out around the sides of the ship, brilliantly illuminating it. And immediately, from somewhere in the depths of the ship, appeared twelve fair damsels, who fell upon their knees before King Arthur, saluting him by name, and welcoming him to the best cheer that their means could provide.

"You are welcome, whoever you be," said Arthur, "and have our thanks for your kindly good will."

"Follow us then, noble sir."

Arthur and his companions followed their fair guides into a cabin of the ship, where they were glad to see a table richly provided with the most delicate viands, and set with the rarest wines. The king marvelled greatly at this, for never in his life had he fared better at supper than at this royal feast.

The meal ended, Arthur was led into a richly-appointed chamber, whose regal furniture and appointments he had never seen surpassed. His companions were conducted to chambers no less richly appointed, and quickly the three weary hunters fell asleep, for they were exhausted with their day's labor.

Perilous was the sleep that came upon them, for they little dreamed that they had been lured into an enchanted ship, and that strange adventures awaited them all, and deadly danger threatened the king.

For when the next day dawned, Uriens woke to find himself at Camelot, in his own chamber, with his wife. Much he marvelled at this, for he had fallen asleep the evening before at two days' journey distant. As for Accolan, we shall tell later what befell him. Arthur woke to find himself in utter darkness, while the air was full of doleful sounds. On feeling round him he soon

discovered that he was in a dismal dungeon, and on listening he discovered that the sounds he heard were the woeful complaints of prisoners.

"What place is this, and who are ye that bewail so bitterly?" asked Arthur.

"We are twenty knights that have long been held prisoners here, some for seven years and some for less."

"For what cause?" inquired Arthur.

"How came you here, that you know not the cause?"

"I came by foul enchantment," said Arthur, and told them his adventure, at which they wondered greatly. "Now tell me," he asked, "how came you in this direful state?"

"We are victims of an evil-hearted villain," they answered. "The lord of this castle, Sir Damas by name, is a coward and traitor, who keeps his younger brother, Sir Ontzlake, a valiant and worthy knight, out of his estate. Hostility has long ruled between them, and Ontzlake proffers to fight Damas for his livelihood, or to meet in arms any knight who may take up his quarrel. Damas is too faint-hearted to fight himself, and is so hated that no knight will fight for him. This is why we are here. Finding no knight of his own land to take up his quarrel, he has lain in wait for knights errant, and taken prisoner every one that entered his country. All of us preferred imprisonment to fighting for such a scoundrel, and here we have long lain half dead with hunger

while eighteen good knights have perished in this prison; yet not a man of us would fight in so base a quarrel."

"This is a woeful story, indeed," said Arthur. "I despise treason as much as the best of you, but it seems to me I should rather take the choice of combat than of years in this dungeon. God can be trusted to aid the just cause. Moreover, I came not here like you, and have but your words for your story. Fight I will, then, rather than perish."

As they spoke a damsel came to King Arthur, bearing a light.

"How fare you?" she asked.

"None too well," he replied.

"I am bidden to say this to you," she remarked. "If you will fight for my lord, you shall be delivered from this prison. Otherwise you shall stay here for life."

"It is a hard alternative," said Arthur; "I should deem only a madman would hesitate. I should rather fight with the best knight that ever wore armor than spend a week in such a vile place. To this, then, I agree. If your lord will deliver all these prisoners, I will fight his battle."

"Those are the terms he offers," said the damsel.

"Then tell him I am ready. But he must provide me with horse and armor, and vow on his knightly honor to keep his word."

"All this he will freely do."

"It seems to me, damsel, that I have seen you before. Have you not been at the court of King Arthur?"

"Not so," said the damsel. "I have never been there, but am the daughter of the lord of this castle, who has always kept me at home."

In this, as the chronicles tell us, she spoke falsely, for she was one of the damsels of Morgan le Fay, and well she knew the king.

Damas was glad at heart to learn that a knight had at last consented to fight for him, and the more so when he saw Arthur and marked his strong limbs and the high spirit in his face. But he, and none there save the damsel, knew who his prisoner was.

"It were a pity," said all who saw him, "that such a knight should die in prison. It is wise in him to fight, whatever betide."

Then agreement was made that Arthur should do battle to the uttermost for the lord of the castle, who, on his part, agreed to set free the imprisoned knights. To this covenant both parties took oath, whereupon the twenty knights were brought from their dark prison to the castle hall, and given their freedom and the privilege of seeing the battle.

But now we must leave the story of Arthur and Damas, and turn to that of Accolan of Gaul, the third of the three knights who had gone to sleep in the enchanted ship. This knight was, unknown to Arthur, a lover of Morgan le Fay, being he for

whose sake she had counterfeited the magic scabbard of the sword Excalibur.

She loved him, indeed, as ardently as she had grown to hate her royal brother, and through this love she had laid a treacherous plot for Arthur's death.

When Accolan awoke, to his surprise he found himself no longer in the ship, but lying within half a foot of the side of a deep well, in seeming peril of his life, for he might at any moment have fallen into the water. Out of this well there came a pipe of silver, from which a crystal stream ran into a high marble basin. When Accolan beheld all this he crossed himself and said,—

"God save my lord King Arthur, and King Uriens, for those damsels in the ship have betrayed us all. They were not women, but devils, and if I escape this misadventure I shall destroy all enchantresses wherever I find them."

As he spoke, there came to him a dwarf with a great mouth and a flat nose, who saluted him, and said that he came from Morgan le Fay.

"She sends you her greetings, and bids you be of strong heart, for to-morrow it shall be your task to fight a knight of the greatest prowess. That you may win in the combat she has sent you Arthur's sword Excalibur, with its magical scabbard. She bids you do the battle to the uttermost without mercy, and promises to make a queen of the damsel whom you shall send to her with the head of the knight you fight with."

"I shall do her bidding," said Accolan, "and cannot fail to win, now that I have this sword, for which I fervently thank her. When saw you my lady queen?"

"I am just from her."

"Recommend me to her, and tell her I shall do all I have promised, or die for it. These crafts and enchantments that have happened—are they of her making?"

"That you may well believe. She has prepared them to bring on this battle."

"Who, then, is the knight with whom I shall fight? It seems to me he should be a noble one, for such preparation."

"That my lady has not told me."

As they spoke there came to them a knight and a lady, with six squires, who asked Sir Accolan why he lay there, and begged him to rise and come with them to a neighboring manor, where he might rest in better ease. As fortune willed it, this manor was the dwelling of Sir Ontzlake, the brother of the traitor Damas.

Accolan gladly accepted the invitation, but not long had he been in the manor when word came from Damas, saying that he had found a knight who was ready to do battle to the death for their claims, and challenging Ontzlake to make ready without delay for the field, or to send a knight to take his side in the combat.

This challenge troubled Ontzlake sorely. Not long before he had been sadly hurt in a joust, and

was still weak from his wound. Accolan, to whom all this was made known, at once came, with the generous impulse of a true knight, to his host, and offered to do battle in his stead. In his heart, too, he felt that this might be the combat of which Morgan had warned him, and with the aid of Arthur's sword and scabbard he could not fail to win.

Ontzlake thanked him deeply for his generous offer, and without delay sent word to Damas that he would be ready with a champion at the hour appointed, and trust to God's grace for the issue of the combat.

When morning came, Arthur was arrayed in a suit of chain mail and provided with a strong horse, which he viewed with knightly ardor.

"When shall we to the field?" he asked Damas.

"As soon as you have heard Mass."

Mass was scarcely ended when a squire rode up from Ontzlake, to say that his knight was already in the field, and to bid Damas bring his champion to the lists, for he was prepared to do battle to the utterance.

Then Arthur mounted his war-horse and rode to the field, attended by all the knights and commons of the country round; twelve good men of the district having been chosen to wait upon the two knights, and see that the battle was conducted fairly and according to the rules of chivalry.

As they rode forward a damsel came to Arthur,

bringing him a sword like unto Excalibur, with a scabbard that seemed in every point the same.

"Morgan le Fay sends you your sword, for the great love she bears you," said the messenger, "and hopes it may do you worthy service in the fray."

Arthur took it and thanked her, never dreaming that he had been treated falsely. But the sword that was sent him was but a brittle and worthless blade, and the scabbard was a base counterfeit of that magic one which he who wore could lose no blood, and which he in brotherly trust had given to the care of his faithless sister.

CHAPTER II.

THE COMBAT OF ARTHUR AND ACCOLAN.

THE time for the battle having come, the two knights took their places at the opposite sides of the lists, neither knowing with whom he fought, and both bent on doing battle to the death. Then putting spurs to their steeds, they dashed across the field with headlong speed, each striking the other in the middle of the shield with his spear, and with such force that horses and men alike were hurled to the earth. In a moment both the combatants started up in warlike fury and drew their swords.

At this juncture there came among the spectators the damsel Nimue, she who had put Merlin under the stone. She knew, by the art that Merlin had taught her, how Morgan le Fay had plotted that Arthur should be slain that day, and she came to save his life if it lay in her power, for she loved the king as deeply as she hated Merlin.

Eagerly to battle went the two knights, hewing at each other like giants with their swords. But Arthur's blade bit not like Accolan's, which wounded him at nearly every stroke, so that soon his blood was flowing from a dozen wounds, while his opponent remained unhurt.

Arthur was in deep dismay on beholding this. That some treason had been practised on him he felt sure, for his sword bit not steel as a good blade should, while the sword in Accolan's hand seemed to have the trenchant edge of Excalibur.

"Sir knight," said Accolan, "keep well your guard if you care for life."

"Thus will I," answered Arthur, and he dealt him a blow on the helm that nearly brought him to the ground.

Accolan drew back from the staggering stroke, and then with a furious onset rushed on Arthur, and dealt him so fierce a blow that the king had much ado to keep his feet. Thus stroke by stroke went on the battle, each knight roused to fury, and each fighting with his utmost skill and strength; but Accolan lost scarcely a drop of blood, while

Arthur's life-blood flowed so freely that only his knightly soul and unyielding courage kept him on his feet. He grew so feeble that he felt as if death was upon him, yet, though he staggered like a drunken man, he faced Accolan with the unquenched spirit of a noble knight.

All who saw the field marvelled that Arthur could fight after such a loss of blood. So valiant a knight none there had ever beheld, and many prayed the two brothers to come into accord and stop this deadly fray. But this Damas would not do, and though Ontzlake trembled for his cause he could not end the combat.

At this juncture Arthur withdrew a little to rest, but Accolan called him fiercely to the fight, saying, "I shall not suffer you to rest; neither of us must rest except in death."

With these words he advanced towards the king, who, with the strength of rage, sprang upon him and struck him so mighty a blow on the helm as to make him totter on his feet and nearly fall. But the blow had a serious ending, for Arthur's sword broke at the cross, the blade falling into the blood-stained grass, and only the hilt and pommel remaining in his hand.

When Arthur saw himself thus disarmed he felt sure that his hour of death had come, yet he let not his dread be seen, but held up his shield and lost no ground, facing his mortal foe as boldly as though he was trebly armed.

"Sir knight," cried Accolan, "you are over

come, and can no longer sustain the battle. You are weaponless, and have lost so much blood that I am loath to slay you. Therefore yield to me as recreant, and force me not to kill a helpless foe."

"That I may not do," said Arthur. "I have promised, by the faith of my body, to fight this battle to the uttermost; and I had rather die in honor than live in shame. If I lack weapon, I lack not spirit; and if you slay me weaponless, the shame be on you."

"That shame I can bear," said Accolan. "What I have sworn I will perform. Since you will not yield, you are a dead man."

This said, he struck Arthur a furious blow, that almost felled him to the earth, bidding him at the same time to crave for mercy if he would live. Arthur's only reply was to press upon him with his shield, and deal him such a buffet with the pommel of his sword as to send him staggering three paces back.

And now the damsel Nimue, stirred by the prowess of the king, and fearful of his death, determined to aid him by all her power of enchantment.

Therefore, when Accolan recovered himself and struck Arthur another stroke, she threw a spell upon him and caused the sword to fall from his hand to the earth. At once the king lightly leaped to it and seized it, thrusting Accolan fiercely back. As soon as his hand had touched the hilt he knew it for his sword Excalibur.

"You have been too long from me," he said, "and no small damage you have done me. Treason has been at work, and treason shall have its deserts."

Then, seeing the scabbard hanging by Accolan's side, he sprang suddenly forward and wrenched it from him, flinging it across the field as far as he could throw it.

"Now, sir knight," cried Arthur, "my turn has come. You have nearly brought my life to an end with this sword, and I warrant that you shall be rewarded for the blood I have lost and the pain I have endured this day."

Therewith, furious as a wounded lion, Arthur rushed upon his foe, hurled him with all his strength to the earth, tore off his helm, and gave him such a blow upon the head that blood burst out from his ears, nose, and mouth.

"Now shall I slay you," said Arthur.

"Do so if you will," said Accolan. "You are the best knight I ever met, and I see now that God is with you. But I promised to do this battle to the uttermost, and never to yield me recreant. Therefore kill me if you will, for my voice shall never ask for mercy."

Then Arthur, looking closer, saw something familiar in his face.

"Tell me who you are," he cried; "of what country and court."

"Sir knight," said Accolan, "I am of the court of King Arthur, and my name is Accolan of Gaul."

Arthur heard this with deep dismay. For there came into his mind the enchantment of the ship, and his heart sank with fear of the treason of his sister.

"Tell me this also, sir knight," he asked, "from whom had you this sword?"

"Woe worth that sword," cried Accolan; "I have gotten my death by it."

"That may well be," answered Arthur, "and I fancy have got no more than you deserve."

"Yesterday," said the knight, "Morgan le Fay sent me that sword by a dwarf, that with it I might slay the knight with whom I should fight this day! And she would also pledge me to slay King Arthur, her brother, for she hates him above any man in the world."

"How know you that to be so?"

"I have loved her long, and know her purposes well, nor shall I longer keep them secret. If by craft she could slay Arthur, she would quickly dispose of her husband, King Uriens. Then it was her intent to make me king of this realm, and to reign herself as its queen. But all this now is at an end, for death is upon me."

"It would have been great wrong in you to destroy your lord," said Arthur.

"That I never could have had the heart to do," said Accolan. "But I pray you to tell me your name, and from what court you come?"

"I am from Camelot, and men know me as

King Arthur. I am he against whom you plotted such deep treason."

Then Accolan cried out in anguish,—

"My fair, sweet lord, have mercy on me, for I knew you not."

"You knew me not at this time, Accolan, but you have confessed that you plotted treason against me, and laid plans to compass my death. Yet I blame you the less that Morgan le Fay has worked on you with her false arts. I have honored and loved her most of all my kin, and have trusted her as I would my wife, and this is how she repays me. By the faith of my body, if I live I shall be deeply revenged upon her for this."

Then he called to the keepers of the field, and said,—

"Here, fair sirs, are two knights who have fought nearly to the death through ignorance of each other. For had either of us known the other you would have seen no battle to-day, and no stroke given or returned."

Then Accolan called out to those who had gathered around,—

"Lords and knights, this noble warrior with whom I have fought is the man of most valor, manhood, and worship on English soil, for he is no less than our liege lord, King Arthur. Had I but dreamed it was he, I would have killed myself rather than have drawn sword against him."

At this surprising news the people fell upon

their knees before the king and begged mercy and pardon.

"Pardon you shall have," said the king, "for you were ignorant of my person. It is my fault if harm came to me in disguise. And here you may all see what adventures and dangers knights-errant are exposed to; for, unknown to each other, I and one of my own knights have fought for hours, to the great damage of us both. We are both sorely hurt, but before seeking rest it is my duty to settle the dispute which gave rise to this combat. I have been your champion, Sir Damas, and have won your cause. But as the victor I claim the right to give judgment, and as I know you for a villain and coward, I adjudge unto your brother all the manor in dispute, with the provision that he hold it of you, and yearly give you in lieu of rent a palfrey to ride upon, which will become such a base poltroon much better than a war-horse. And I charge you, upon pain of death, to restore to these twenty knights their armor and property, and never again to distress a knight-errant. If complaint of such shall be made to me, by my head, you shall die for it. Sir Ontzlake, you are said to be a good and valiant knight, and true and worthy in your deeds. I desire you to come to my court as soon as possible, where you shall be one of my knights, and, if your deeds hereafter conform to the good report I have heard of you, you soon shall equal your brother in estate."

"I am at your command," said Ontzlake, "and thank you humbly for your goodness and bounty. As for this battle, I would have fought it myself, only that lately I was deeply wounded in a combat with a wandering knight."

"I would it had been so," said Arthur, "for treason was used against me in this combat, and had I fought with you I should not have been so badly hurt. My own sword was stolen and I was given a false and brittle blade, which failed me in my greatest need."

"Great pity it is that a king so noble and a knight so worthy should have been thus foully dealt with."

"I shall reward the traitor in short time, by the grace of God," said Arthur. "Now tell me how far I am from Camelot?"

"You are two days' journey distant."

"Then where can I obtain shelter and rest?"

"There is an abbey but three miles distant, where you will find skilled leeches and good nursing."

Then King Arthur took his leave of the people, and repaired with Accolan to the abbey, where he and the knight were placed under medical care. Arthur's wounds, though deep and painful, proved not serious, and he rapidly recovered, but Accolan had lost so much blood that he died within four days. Then Arthur had the corpse sent on a horse-bier, attended by six knights, to Camelot, saying to the messengers,—

"Bear this body to my sister, Morgan le Fay, and say to her that I send it as a present. Tell her, moreover, that, through her sisterly kindness, I have again my sword Excalibur and the scabbard, and shall visit her ere long."

CHAPTER III.

HOW MORGAN CHEATED THE KING.

In the meantime Morgan le Fay was so sure of the success of her murderous plot, to aid which she had used all her power of necromancy, that she felt it safe to complete her scheme. Seeing her husband, King Uriens, lying asleep upon his couch, she called a maiden, who was in her confidence, and said,—

"Bring me my lord's sword. Now shall my work be ended."

"Oh, madam," cried the damsel, "would you slay your lord! If you do so you can never escape."

"Leave that to me, girl. Bring me the sword at once; I am the best judge of what it is fit to do."

The damsel departed with a heavy heart, but finding Sir Uwaine, King Uriens' son, asleep in another chamber, she waked him and said,—

"Rise at once and go to your mother. She has vowed to kill the king, your father, and has sent me in all haste for his sword."

"To kill him!" cried Uwaine. "What treachery is this?—But go, bring the sword as she bids. Leave it to me to deal with her."

The damsel did as she was bidden, and brought the sword to the queen, giving it to her with hands that quaked with fear. Morgan seized it with a firm grasp, and went boldly to the bedside, where she stood looking with cruel eyes on the sleeping king. As she lifted the sword for the murderous blow, Uwaine, who had silently entered, sprang upon her and seized her hand in a crushing grip.

"You fiend, what would you do?" he fiercely cried. "If you were not my mother I would smite off your head with this sword. Men say that Merlin was born of a devil; but well I believe that I have an earthly fiend for mother. To kill my father thus!—in his slumber!—what foul device is this?"

His face and voice were so full of righteous fury that the queen quaked to her heart with fear, and she clasped her hands in terror upon her throat.

"Oh, Uwaine, my dear son, have mercy on me! The foul fiend tempted me to this deed. Let me live to repent of this base intent, which I pray you to keep secret. I swear never again to attempt so foul a deed."

"Can I trust you? Truth and murder do not go together."

"On my soul, I vow to keep my word!"

"Live, then; but beware you rouse me not again by such a murderous thought."

Hardly had the false-hearted queen escaped from the indignation of her son when tidings came to her which filled her with as deep a dread as when Uwaine had threatened her with the sword, while the grief it brought her was deeper than her fear. For she learned that Accolan had been slain in the battle, and that his dead body had been sent her. Soon, indeed, came the funeral train, with the message that Arthur had sent. Then sorrow and terror together filled her heart till it threatened to break, for she had loved Accolan with all her soul, and his fate wounded her almost to death. But she dared not let this grief be seen upon her countenance, lest the secret of her love should be discovered; and she was forced to wear a cheerful aspect above a bleeding heart. And this she knew, besides, that if she should remain in Camelot until Arthur's return, all the gold in the realm would not buy her life.

She went, therefore, unto Queen Guenever and asked leave to ride into the country.

"Why not remain to greet your brother on his return? He sends word that he will soon be here."

"I should much like to, Guenever, but hasty tidings have come which require that I should make no delay."

"If that be so," answered Guenever, "let me not stay you. You may depart when you will."

On the next morning, before daybreak, Morgan took horse, and rode all that day and the greater part of the night. On the following day by noon she came to the abbey where Arthur lay. Here she asked the nuns where he was, and they answered that he was sleeping in his chamber, for he had had but little rest during the three nights past.

"Then see that none of you waken him," she said. "I will go visit him in his chamber. I am his sister, Morgan le Fay."

Saying this, she sprang from her horse and entered the abbey, going straight to Arthur's chamber. None dare hinder her, and she suffered no one to accompany her. Reaching the chamber she found her brother asleep in bed, with the sword Excalibur clasped with a vigorous grip in his right hand.

When she saw this her heart sank, for it was to steal that sword she came, and she knew her treacherous purpose was at an end. She could not take the sword from his hand without wakening him, and that might be the warrant for her instant death. But the scabbard lay on a chair by the bedside. This she took and left the chamber, concealing it under her mantle as she went. Mounting her horse again, she rode hastily away with her train.

Not long afterwards Arthur woke, and at once missed his scabbard. Calling his attendants in a loud voice, he angrily asked who had been there,

and who had dared remove the missing scabbard. They told him that it was his sister, Morgan le Fay, and that she had put it under her mantle and ridden away with it.

"Then have you watched me falsely," cried Arthur, in hasty passion.

"What could we do?" they answered. "We dared not disobey your sister's command."

"Fetch me at once the best horse that can be found," he ordered, "and bid Sir Ontzlake arm himself in all haste, and come here well mounted to ride with me."

By the hour's end these commands had been obeyed, and Arthur and Ontzlake rode from the abbey in company, well armed and on good horses, though the king was yet feeble from his wound. After riding some distance they reached a way-side cross, by which stood a cowherd, whom they asked if any lady had lately ridden that way.

"Yes, your honors," said the cowherd. "Not long ago a lady passed here at easy speed, followed by about forty horsemen. They rode into yonder forest."

Arthur and Ontzlake at this news put spurs to their horses and followed fast on the track of the fugitives. An hour of this swift pursuit brought them in sight of Morgan's party, and with a heart hot with anger Arthur rode on at the utmost pace of his horse.

The fugitives, seeing themselves thus hotly

chased, spurred on their own steeds, soon leaving the forest and entering a neighboring plain, beside which was a lake. When Morgan saw that she was in danger of being overtaken she rode quickly to the lake-side, her heart filled with spiteful hatred of her brother.

"Whatsoever may happen to me," she cried, "I vow that Arthur shall never again wear this scabbard. I here consign it to the lake. From the water it came; to the water it returns."

And with a strong hand she flung it far out over the deep waters, into which it sank like a stone, for it was heavy with gold and precious stones.

Then she rode on, followed by her train, till they entered a valley where there were many great stones, and where they were for the moment out of sight of their pursuers. Here Morgan le Fay brought her deepest powers of enchantment to work, and in a trice she and her horse were changed into marble, while each of her followers became converted into a statue of stone.

Hardly had this been done when Arthur and Ontzlake entered the valley, where they beheld with starting eyes the marvellous transformation. For in place of the fugitives they saw only horses and riders of solid stone, and so changed that the king could not tell his sister from her men, nor one knight from another.

"A marvel is here, indeed!" cried the king.

"The vengeance of God has fallen upon our foes, and Morgan le Fay is justly punished for her treachery. It grieves me, indeed, that so heavy a fate has befallen her, yet her own deeds have brought on her this mighty punishment."

Then he sought on all sides for the scabbard, but it could nowhere be found. Disappointed in this, he at length turned and rode slowly back with his companion to the abbey whence they had come, their souls filled with wonder and awe.

Yet no sooner were they well gone than the enchantress brought another charm to work, and at once she and all her people were turned again from stone into flesh and blood.

"Now we can go where we will; and may joy go with King Arthur," she said, with a laugh of triumph to her knights. "Did you note him?"

"Yes," they replied. "And his countenance was so warlike that had we not been stone we could scarce have stood before him."

"I believe you," said Morgan. "He would have made sad havoc among us but for my spells."

They now rode onward, and soon afterwards met a knight who bore before him on his horse another knight, who was unarmed, blindfolded, and bound hand and foot.

"What are you about to do with that knight?" asked Morgan.

"To drown him in yonder fountain," was the reply. "He has caused my wife to prove false to me, and only his death will avenge my honor."

"Is this the truth?" she asked the bound knight.

"It is false," he replied. "He is a villain to whom I have done no wrong. He took me unawares or I should not have been in such a state."

"Who are you, and of what country?"

"My name is Manassen. I am of the court of King Arthur, and cousin to Accolan of Gaul."

"Then for the love I bore your cousin you shall be delivered, and this villain be put in your plight."

By her orders Manassen was loosed from his bonds and the other knight bound. Manassen took from him his armor and horse, and riding with him to the fountain, flung him remorselessly in, where he met the fate which he had devised for his late prisoner. Then Manassen rode back to Morgan, and asked her if she had any word to send King Arthur.

"Tell him," she answered, "that I rescued you not for love of him, but of Accolan; and that I fear him not while I can turn myself and my knights into stones. Let him know that you saw us riding in good flesh and blood, and laughing him to scorn. Tell him, moreover, that I can do stranger things than that if the need should come."

Bidding Manassen to return with this message, she rode with her train into the country of Gore, where she was well received, and in the might of whose castles and towns she felt secure from Arthur's wrath, for much she feared his vengeance should she fall into his hands.

Meantime the king rode back to Camelot, where he was gladly received by his queen and his knights, to whom he told in full the story of Morgan le Fay's treason. They were all angry at this, and many knights declared that she should be burned.

"Stone will not burn," said Arthur. "But God has punished her."

But as they thus conversed, Manassen came to the court and told the king of his adventure, delivering to him Morgan's message.

"Then the witch has tricked me!" cried the king, in a tone of vexation. "I might have known it, had I been wise. A kind sister she is, indeed! But my turn will come. Treachery and magic may succeed for a time, but honor must win in the end."

Yet despite the king's awakened distrust, he nearly fell a victim to his sister's vile enchantments. For on the succeeding morning there came a damsel to the court from Morgan le Fay, bearing with her the richest mantle that had ever been seen there. It was set so full of precious stones that it might almost have stood alone, and some of them were gems worth a king's ransom.

"Your sister sends you this mantle," said the bearer. "That she has done things to offend you she knows and is sorry for; and she desires that you shall take this gift from her as a tribute for her evil thoughts. What else can be done to

amend her acts she will do, for she bitterly regrets her deeds of wickedness."

The mantle pleased the king greatly, though he made but brief reply as he accepted it from the hand of the messenger.

At that perilous moment there came to him the damsel Nimue, who had so recently helped him in his dire need.

"Sir, may I speak with you in private?" she asked the king.

"What have you to say?" he replied, withdrawing from the throng.

"It is this. Beware that you do not put on this mantle, and that no knight of yours puts it on, till you know more. The serpent does not so soon lose its venom. There is death in the mantle's folds. At least do this: before you wear it, command that she who brought it shall put it on."

"Well said," answered the king. "It shall be done as you advise."

Then he returned to the messenger and said,—

"Damsel, I wish to see the mantle you have brought me tried upon yourself."

"A king's garment on me, sir! That would not be seemly."

"Seemly or not, I command it. By my head, you shall wear it before it come on my back, or that of any man here."

The damsel drew back, quivering with fear and growing pale as death. But the king commanded those about him to put it on her. Then

was seen a marvellous and fearful thing. For no sooner had the enchanted robe been clasped around her form than flames burst out from its every thread, and in a minute she fell to the floor dead, while her body was burnt to a coal.

The king's anger burst out fiercely at this, and his face flamed with the fire of rage. He turned to King Uriens and his son, who stood among the knights.

"My sister, your wife, is doing her utmost to destroy me," he said, in burning wrath. "Are you and my nephew, your son, joined with her in this work of treachery? Yet I suspect not you, King Uriens, for Accolan confessed to me that she would have slain you as well as me. But as for your son, Uwaine, I hold him suspected, and banish him from my court. I can have no traitors about me."

When these words had been spoken, Gawaine rose in anger, and said,—

"Whoever banishes my cousin banishes me. When and where Uwaine goes I go also."

And with a stride of anger he left the great hall, followed by Uwaine. Then the two knights armed themselves, and rode together from Camelot, Gawaine vowing never to return till his cousin had been fully and freely pardoned.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COUNTRY OF STRANGE ADVENTURES.

The two knights who had so hastily departed from Arthur's court were destined to see many and strange adventures before they should return. And as their wanderings and deeds were caused by the treason of Morgan le Fay, it is meet that they should here be told.

They spent their first night in an abbey not far from Camelot, and on the next morning rode forward until they came to a forest. Passing through this, they at length found themselves in a valley near a tower. Here they beheld two knights fully armed and seated on their war-horses, while twelve damsels were seen to pass to and fro beneath a tree.

When the wanderers came nearer they saw that on that tree hung a white shield, and that as the damsels passed by this they spat upon it and befouled it with mire.

"Why do you do this despite to the shield?" they asked, as they came up.

"Sir knights," answered the damsels, "we have good cause for what we do. He who has hung his shield here is a knight of great prowess, but he is one who hates all ladies, and this is how we repay him for his hatred."

"I think little of such a knight," said Gawaine. "Yet it may be that he has good cause for his hatred. He must love ladies elsewhere, if not here, if he be so good a knight as you say. For it is said that the despiser of ladies is never worthy in arms. What is the name of this knight?"

"His name is Marhaus. He is the son of the king of Ireland."

"I know him well," said Uwaine. "There is no man of more valor living. I saw him once at a tournament where no knight could stand before him."

"If this is his shield," said Gawaine, "he will soon be here in person, and it may not prove so easy for these knights to face him on horseback as for them to stand by and see his shield befouled. It is not our quarrel, but we shall stay no longer to see this dishonor."

Before they had withdrawn far, however, they saw the Irish knight riding towards his shield, and halted to note what would follow. At sight of him the damsels shrieked with terror, and ran so wildly towards the turret that some of them fell by the way. But one of the knights advanced his shield and cried loudly,—

"Sir Marhaus, defend yourself!"

Then he and Marhaus rode fiercely together, the knight breaking his spear without effect, while Marhaus smote him in return so hard a blow that he was hurled to the ground with a broken neck. Then the other knight rode against

Marhaus, but with the same ill success, for both horse and man were smitten so furiously that they fell to the earth dead.

Then the knight of Ireland rode to his shield, and when he saw how foully it had been used he cried,—

"This is a foul shame; but I have requited it upon those dastards. For the love of her who gave me this white shield I shall wear it, and hang mine where it was."

Thereupon he took the white shield, and left in its place the one he had just used.

Then, seeing the two errant knights, he asked them what they did there. They answered that they were from Arthur's court, and had ridden in search of adventures.

"Then you can have one here," said Marhaus. "I shall be glad to joust with you."

He rode away from them to the proper range, without waiting for a reply.

"Let him go," said Uwaine. "I fear he is more than our match."

"I care not if he is," said Gawaine. "However good a knight he be, he shall not challenge us unanswered."

"Then let me meet him first. I am the weaker, and if he strikes me down you can revenge me."

With these words Uwaine took his place and rode against the Irish knight, but with such ill fortune that he was hurled to the earth with a wounded side. When Gawaine saw this he pre-

pared for the joust, and the two knights rode together with great force. But, as luck would have it, Gawaine's spear broke, while that of Marhaus held firm. In consequence, both Gawaine and his horse went to the ground.

In an instant the knight was on his feet, sword in hand, and advancing towards his adversary. Marhaus drew his sword and moved upon him mounted.

"Meet me on foot," cried Gawaine, "or I will kill your horse."

"Gramercy, you teach me courtesy," said Marhaus. "It is not fair for one knight to be on foot and the other on horse."

Then he sprang to the ground, set his spear against a tree, and tied his horse. This done, he drew his sword and advanced upon Gawaine.

The combat that succeeded was long and hotly contested, beginning at nine in the morning and lasting till the day was well advanced. Never had that forest known so obstinate and fierce a fight. And from nine of the clock till the hour of noon Gawaine grew stronger and stronger, till his might was thrice increased, and Marhaus had much ado to stand before him. But as the day waned from noon onwards Gawaine grew feeble, while the strength of Marhaus steadily increased, his form seeming to grow larger with every hour. At length it came that Gawaine could scarcely stand before him.

"Sir knight," said Marhaus, "this I will say,

that I never met a better man than yourself, and we have had a noble passage at arms. But as we have no quarrel, and I can see you are growing feeble, it were a pity to do you more harm. If you are willing, I agree to end the fight."

"That should I have said, gentle knight," answered Gawaine. "I am much beholden to your courtesy."

Thereupon they took off their helmets and kissed each other, and swore to love one another thenceforth as brethren in arms. Marhaus prayed that the two knights would lodge with him that night, and they rode together towards his dwelling.

"I marvel," said Gawaine, as they rode forward, "that so good a knight as you should love no ladies."

"I love not such as those minxes of the tower, nor any of their sort," said Marhaus. "They are a false-hearted and vile-thinking crew. But to all honorable women I owe the best of my knightly service."

They soon reached the dwelling, which was in a little priory, and here Marhaus gave them the best cheer at his disposal, the more so when he learned that they were sons of King Arthur's sisters. Here they remained seven days, until their wounds had fully healed. On the eighth day they took horse again to continue their journey.

"We shall not part so lightly," said Marhaus. "I shall bring you through the forest, and mayhap ride farther with you."

For seven days more they rode onward without adventure. Then they found themselves on the borders of a still greater forest, in what was known as the country and forest of Arroy and the land of strange adventures.

"It is well named," said Marhaus. "For it is said that no knight ever rode into this country and failed to find adventures many and marvellous."

They rode onward into the forest before them, and in good time found themselves in a deep and stony valley, traversed by a fair stream of water.

Following this upward, they soon came to a fair fountain, the head of the stream, beside which three damsels were seated.

Of these, the eldest was not less than threescore years of age. She wore a garland of gold upon her head, and her hair was white beneath it. The second damsel was thirty years of age, and she also wore a circlet of gold. The third was not over fifteen years old, and her garland was of flowers.

The knights halted and looked at them in surprise, asking them why they sat by that lonely fountain.

"We are here to await knights-errant who come in quest of adventures," they said. "If you three knights are in search of things strange and stirring, each of you must choose one of us. When this is done we shall lead you unto three highways, one of which each of you must take, and

his damsel with him. This day twelvemonth you must meet here again, and to all this you must pledge your troth, if God give you your lives to return."

"You speak well," said Marhaus. "Adventures we seek, and no true knight-errant hesitates before the unknown and the dangerous. We shall do as you say, each of us choose one of you, and then, whatsoever fortune wills, let it come."

"As for me," said Uwaine, "since I am the youngest and weakest of the three, I choose the eldest damsel. I have more need of help than either of you, and her age and knowledge may aid me well."

"Then I shall take her of middle age," said Marhaus. "She fits me best."

"I thank you both," said Gawaine. "You have left me the youngest and fairest, and the one most to my liking."

This said, each damsel took the reins of her knight, and they led them to the parting of the three ways. Here the knights took oath to meet at the fountain that day twelvemonth if they were living, kissed each other, and departed, each knight taking his chosen lady on his steed behind him. Of the three ways, Uwaine took that which lay west, Marhaus that which lay south, and Gawaine took the way that lay north.

Of the three we shall first follow Gawaine, who rode forward until he came to a fair manor, where dwelt an old knight.

"Are there any adventures to be found in this country?" he asked him.

"I shall show you some marvellous ones to-morrow," said his host.

In the morning Gawaine and the old knight rode into the forest of adventures till they came to a wide, open lawn, upon which stood a cross. Here they halted and looked about them, and ere long saw approaching a knight of seemly aspect, who made the bitterest lamentations as he advanced. When he saw Gawaine he saluted him, and hoped that God would send him honor.

"As to that, gramercy," said Gawaine. "I pray God, in return, that he send you honor and worship."

"That will not come," said the knight. "He sendeth me but sorrow and shame."

As he spoke he passed on to the other side of the lawn. Here Gawaine saw ten knights, standing with shields and spears ready against this one warrior. But he rode against them one by one, thrusting some over their horses' tails, and hurling others to the ground, horse and man, until with one spear he had unhorsed them all.

But when they were all ten on foot they went to the dolorous knight, who stood stone still, pulled him from his horse, and tied him beneath the animal, without the least resistance on his part. This done, they led him away, thus shamefully bound.

"That is an ugly sight," said Gawaine. "Why

does a knight of such prowess as this suffer himself to be so vilely treated?"

"Sir," said the damsel to Gawaine, "why helped you not that good knight?"

"He seems to want no help," said Gawaine. "He could have taken care of himself if he would."

"You had no desire to help him," retorted the damsel, "or you would not have stood by and seen so noble a warrior so foully served."

As they talked a knight appeared on the other side of the lawn, all armed but the head. And opposite him came a dwarf on horseback similarly armed. He had a great mouth and a short nose, and was as ill favored as one would care to see.

"Where is the lady who should meet us here?" asked the dwarf.

In response thereto a fair lady rode from the wood, mounted on a handsome palfrey. On seeing her the knight and the dwarf began to strive in hot words for her, each saying that she should be his prize.

"Yonder is a knight at the cross," said the dwarf, at length. "Let us leave it to him, and abide by his decision."

"I agree to that," said the knight.

Thereupon they rode to Gawaine and told him the purpose of their strife.

"Do you put the matter into my hands?" he asked.

"Yes," they both replied.

"Then this is my decision. Let the lady stand between you and make her own choice. The one she chooses, he shall have her."

This was done, and at once the lady turned from the knight and went to the dwarf. Then the dwarf took her and went singing away, while the knight rode in grief and sorrow into the forest.

But the adventures of that day were not ended, for soon afterwards two armed knights rode from the forest, and one of them cried out loudly,—

"Sir Gawaine, knight of King Arthur, I am here to joust with you. So make ready."

"Since you know me, I shall not fail you," answered Gawaine.

Then the knights drew apart, and rode so furiously together that both were unhorsed. Springing up, they drew their swords and continued the battle on foot.

Meanwhile, the second knight went to the damsel and asked why she stayed with that knight, and begged her to go with him.

"That will I do," she replied. "I like not the way Gawaine acted just now, when one brave knight was overturned by ten dastards. So let us go while they fight."

The combat continued long, and then, as the knights seemed evenly matched, they ceased in amity, the stranger knight inviting Gawaine to spend the night at his lodge. As they rode thither he asked his host,—

"Who is this valiant champion that overturns

ten knights, and then suffers them to bear him off bound hand and foot? I never saw so shameful a thing done."

"The thing has happened ten times and more," said Sir Carados. "The knight is one of noble prowess, named Sir Pelleas, and he loves a great lady of this country named Ettard, who loves him not in return. What you have seen came about in this way. There was of late days a great tournament in this country, at which Pelleas struck down every knight who was opposed to him, unhorsing twenty knights within three days. His valor and prowess won him the prize, which was a good sword, and a golden circlet to be given to the fairest lady at the lists. This circlet of gold he gave to the lady Ettard, whom he chose for the sovereign of his heart and the lady he loved above all women. But she was so proud and haughty that she returned him scorn for his love, and though he has followed her to her home she will not listen to his suit, or admit him in honor to her presence. He is lodged here near her, but can gain sight of her only in a shameful way. Every week she sends knights to fight with him, and when he has overcome them he suffers them to take him prisoner that he may feast his eyes on the face of his loved lady. But she does him great despite, for sometimes she has him brought in tied to his horse's tail, and sometimes bound under the horse, or in any other shameful manner she can think of. For all this he will

not leave, but makes himself a martyr to his love."

"He is a noble knight, and I greatly pity him," said Gawaine. "I shall seek him to-morrow in the forest, and do what I can to help him."

In the morning he met Sir Pelleas, as he had promised, and heard from him the story of his woe.

"If I loved her not so truly I should rather die a hundred times than suffer such despite," he said. "But I trust that she will pity and love me at last."

"Let me aid you, so far as I can," said Gawaine. "I promise to do my utmost to gain you the love of your lady."

"Tell me who, and of what court, you are, my good friend?" asked Pelleas.

"My name is Gawaine; I am nephew to King Arthur, and King Lot of Orkney was my father."

"My name is Pelleas," answered the lovelorn knight. "I was born in the Isles, and am lord of many isles, but never till this unhappy time have I loved a lady. I pray you help me faithfully, for I get nothing from her but vile rebuke. She will not even hold me as prisoner, that I might see her daily, but robs me of my horse and armor, and has me thrust despitefully from her gates. She lives in a strong castle near by, and is lady of all this country. I fear you will not find it easy to obtain entrance."

"I shall use art instead of strength," said

Gawaine. "Lend me your horse and armor, and I will ride to her castle and tell her I have slain you. She will let me in at that. Once admitted, I shall do my best to win you her love."

He plighted his honor to this, and therewith they changed horses and armor.

Leaving the knight of the doleful visage, Gawaine rode to Ettard's castle, whom he found in her pavilion outside the gate. On seeing him she hastily fled to the castle, but he called her loudly, declaring that he was not Pelleas, and that he had slain the knight and won his horse and armor."

"Take off your helm," she replied. "Let me see your face."

Gawaine did so, and when she saw that he spoke the truth she bade him alight and led him into the castle, questioning him who he was and how he had slain her tormenting admirer.

"I am sorry for his death," she said, "for he was a worthy knight; but of all men I hated him most, and could never rid myself of his importunities. As for you, Sir Gawaine, since you have done me this service, I shall be your lady, for I cannot but love you."

Then Gawaine was so entranced by the lady Ettard's blue eyes and fair face that he shamefully forgot his word of honor, and warmly returned her love. He remained with her and her knights in the castle, so happy in her presence as to ignore all the claims of duty and knightly faith.

It was now the month of May, and the air had grown warm and balmy. So it happened one evening that they all left the castle to enjoy themselves on the flowery meads outside. Believing Pelleas to be dead, Ettard lost all dread of unwelcome intrusion, and suggested that they should spend the night in the open air, lulled to sleep by the soft winds and the perfume of flowers.

But by fortune it chanced that Pelleas, hearing no word from Gawaine, that night mounted his horse and rode to the castle. It was a late hour, and he was surprised to see pavilions erected outside the gate, and couches spread in the open air. As he came near he saw knights and ladies asleep on these, while side by side lay Ettard and Gawaine, locked in deep slumber.

Anger and pain so filled the knight's heart at this that he drew his sword to slay his faithless friend, but on calmer thought he laid the naked blade athwart the throats of knight and lady and rode away. On reaching his tent, he told his attendants what treachery he had endured, and that he had resolved to take to his bed and lie there till he should die.

"And when I am dead I charge you to take my heart and bear it to the lady Ettard in a silver dish, and tell her that her falseness has slain the faithfulest of lovers."

Meanwhile Gawaine and Ettard awoke, and their dread was great on finding the sword across their throats.

"It is Pelleas's sword!" she cried. "You have betrayed him and me both, for you lied to me in saying that you had killed him. Only that he has proved himself a man of true honor, he would have slain us both. Leave me, traitor! Never let me see your false face again!"

Gawaine had no words in answer, but hastily mounted his horse and rode into the forest, feeling at heart that he had proved a traitor both to honor and love.

When morning dawned it happened that Nimue, the damsel of the lake, who by chance had come into that country, met with a follower of Sir Pelleas, who was grieving sorely for the ill fortune of his master. She asked him the cause of his grief, and he told her the woeful tale of the lovelorn knight, and how he had taken to his bed, vowing never again to rise.

"He shall not die of love, I warrant you that," she said. "Bring me to him. I promise you that she who has treated him so vilely shall feel all the pain she has made him endure."

She was accordingly brought to the tent of Pelleas, and a feeling of pity and love grew in her heart as she looked on his noble and woe-worn face while he lay asleep. Therefore she deepened his slumber with a spell of enchantment, and charging that no man should wake him before her return, she rode through the forest to Ettard's castle.

Within two hours she brought the lady Ettard

to the tent, where Pelleas still lay wrapped in deep slumber.

"You should do penance for life to murder such a knight as this," she said. "You have treated a true lover with shameful despite, and for love's sake you shall pay the penalty of your misdeeds."

Then she threw so deep a spell of enchantment on the proud lady that her former scorn turned to the deepest love, and her heart went out to Pelleas as if it would break with sorrow and remorse.

"Alas!" she cried, "I hated him above all men. What has befallen me that I love him now with my whole soul?"

"It is God's righteous judgment," said Nimue.

As they spoke Pelleas awoke, and when he looked upon Ettard his eyes filled with scorn and hatred.

"Away, traitress!" he cried. "Never again come within my sight. You have taught me to hate you as much as I ever loved."

These scornful words wounded Ettard to the soul. She turned away weeping bitterly, and left the tent overwhelmed with anguish.

"Take your horse and leave this country, Sir Pelleas," said the damsel. "Love not again till you can give your heart to a lady who is worthy of it."

"I have found such a one now," said the knight, fixing his eyes with warm feeling upon her face. "This lady Ettard has treated me

despitefully and turned all my love for her to hatred and scorn. But the love I felt for her has gone out to you."

"Thank me for your delivery," said Nimue "It is too soon to talk of love. But this I may say, that if you love me as you vow, you shall not find me another Ettard."

Soon after Pelleas arose and armed, and bidding his men to follow with the pavilions and furniture, rode into the forest with the damsel of the lake, for whom the love in his heart grew each moment warmer.

And thus this woeful story ends in true love's joy and retribution; for the false lady Ettard died in lovelorn sorrow, but Pelleas and Nimue lived together in true love during the remainder of their days, she becoming his dear lady and wife.

Meanwhile Marhaus and Uwaine pursued their course and had their adventures, but they were not so many and strange as those of Gawaine, and therefore we shall not tell them in full.

As for Uwaine, who rode away with the old damsel, he gained great honor at a tournament near the Welsh marches, winning the prize, which was a gerfalcon, and a white steed with trappings of cloth of gold. Many other adventures he had, and at last came to the castle of a noble lady, who was called the Lady of the Rock. Her lands had been taken from her by two robber knights, named Sir Edward and Sir Hue of the Red Castle. These Uwaine fought together, and with such

good fortune that he killed Sir Edward and forced Sir Hue to surrender the lady's lands. Then he dwelt at the castle of the Lady of the Rock for six months, till he was healed of the many and deep wounds he had received in his battle with the robber knights.

Meanwhile, Marhaus rode southward with the damsel of thirty summers. Many adventures he had, and he won a circlet of gold as the victor in a tournament. At length he stopped at the castle of a noble earl named Fergus, whose lands were harried by a giant named Taulard. Him Marhaus proffered to fight, as neither the earl nor any of his men dared meet him.

Fierce and perilous was the battle that followed, for the giant was of monstrous height and strength, and armed with iron clubs and great battle-axes. But after a terrible contest, Marhaus, by a nimble stroke, cut off Taulard's right arm. Then the giant, bellowing with pain and terror, fled, and rushed into a stream of water beyond his pursuer's reach. But stones were brought to Marhaus by Fergus's men, and with these he battered the giant so sorely that at length he fell over into the water, where he was quickly drowned.

Afterwards the victorious champion went to the giant's castle, where he found in close captivity twenty-four ladies and twelve knights. These he delivered from prison. He found also a great store of wealth, enough to make him rich for the remainder of his life.

When the year ended the three knights met again at the fountain, two of them with their damsels; but Gawaine had lost his, and had come back much shorn of honor. Soon after they met by chance a messenger from King Arthur, who had long been seeking the banished knights, with orders to bring them back to the court.

So the three knights journeyed to Camelot, where the king received them graciously, and listened with admiration to the story of their adventures. And there, at the feast of Pentecost, came Pelleas and Nimue, true lovers plighted. Then were held high feasts and tournaments, where many noble knights splintered spears and much honor was lost and won. And here Marhaus and Pelleas bore themselves with such noble and mighty prowess, that all men vowed the glory of the tournament was theirs, and King Arthur, glad to reward such deeds of valor, made them Knights of the Table Round.

BOOK IV.

LANCELOT OF THE LAKE.

CHAPTER I.

HOW TROUBLE CAME TO LIONEL AND HECTOR.

After the strange deeds and adventures that have just been described, a season of war came again to King Arthur and his realm, through which he won great honor and renown. For Lucius, the Emperor of Rome, sent ambassadors to Arthur, demanding tribute; and when he proudly refused this demand Lucius gathered a great army and invaded the tributary domains of Arthur, in Gaul.

Long and fierce was the war that followed, for Arthur crossed to Gaul with all the power of his realm; fought and killed, single-handed, a huge giant who dwelt on St. Michael's Mount; defeated the army of Rome, and killed the emperor in single combat; and in the end was crowned emperor, in the imperial city of Rome.

All this story the chronicles give at length, and tell us also that in this war the noble Lancelot du Lake, son of King Ban of Gaul, gained his first measure of renown.

After the war had ended and the victorious host returned to England, many adventures came to Lancelot, some of which we must here tell. Great indeed was the valor and might of this worthiest of knights, who in after years proved himself in knightly prowess and chivalric honor the noblest of men. In tournaments and deeds of arms, in sportive war or battle for life or death, he passed all other knights, and was never overcome but by treason or enchantment.

After Arthur's return from Rome sports and feasts were given, and jousts and tournaments held, in which the Knights of the Round Table took part, many who had gained no great fame in the war now proving themselves able and worthy warriors. But above them all Lancelot displayed such skill and prowess that he increased in honor and worship beyond any knight of Arthur's court.

And, as fortune and fate decreed, he loved Queen Guenever above all other ladies, while she held him in favor above all other knights,—a favor that was destined thereafter to bring deep sorrow and trouble to England's realm. For her sake he did many noble deeds of arms, and he was looked upon as her especial champion by all the court.

After the return from Rome Lancelot rested long at the court, taking part in all its feasts and gayeties. But in time he grew weary of sport and play, and of the idle ways and empty flatteries of courtiers, and felt a strong desire to

wander abroad in search of strange adventures. So he bade his nephew, Sir Lionel, to make ready, saying to him that they two would leave the court and ride as knights-errant through the land, to right wrongs and punish crimes, to rescue the oppressed and overthrow the proud and haughty, and knightly to do and dare wherever they went.

So on a day in spring, when the summer was coming with its flowers to adorn the rich green of the grassy meads, and the birds sang gayly in the trees, the two knights armed themselves at all points and rode abroad, passing soon through a deep forest and into a verdant plain beyond.

Noon now came on, and the weather grew close and sultry, so that Lancelot became drowsy. This he told to Lionel, who pointed to a large apple-tree by a hedge, and said,—

"Yonder is a cool shadow. There we may rest ourselves and our horses till the noontide heat has passed."

"You speak to the point," said Lancelot. "Not for seven years have I been so sleepy as I am now."

They thereupon alighted, and tied their horses to neighboring trees, and Lancelot laid himself down beneath the apple-boughs, with his helmet under his head for a pillow. Soon he was in deep slumber, though Lionel kept awake.

As they lay thus three knights came riding by in panic fear, pushing their horses to the utmost speed, while a single knight followed them in

furious pursuit. So well-made and strong-limbed a man as this Lionel thought he had never seen, nor one in all respects so fully armed.

As he looked, the pursuing knight overtook one of the fugitives, and with a thrust of his spear flung him prostrate to the ground. Then he served the other two in the same manner. This done, he alighted and bound the three knights with their own bridle-reins.

When Lionel saw this, anger filled his soul, and he thought to win honor in a bout of arms with this vigorous champion, so he quietly took his horse, so as not to waken Lancelot, and rode towards the victor, loudly bidding him turn and try his fortune in a joust.

But the ambitious young knight soon found that he had let youthful pride bring him into trouble, for the strong warrior smote him so hard a blow that horse and man went together to the earth. Then the victor alighted and served Lionel as he had done the others, binding him and flinging him athwart his own horse.

He did the same with the three others, and rode away with his prisoners, until he came to a castle that lay beyond the plain. Here he forced them to remove their armor, and beat their naked skin with thorns till they were ready to swoon with the pain. Then he had them thrust into a deep prison where were many other knights, whose groans and lamentations filled the air with doleful sounds.

Through all this Lancelot slept on, nor did he waken from his slumber till another misadventure had taken place. For Sir Hector de Maris, the brother of Lionel, finding that Lancelot had left the court to seek adventures, was angry that he had not been asked to keep him company, and rode hastily after him, hoping to overtake him.

After he had ridden long in the forest he met a man dressed like a forester, and asked him if any knightly adventures could be found near by

"Sir knight," answered the forester, "I know this country well, and can promise you all, and mayhap more, than you want. Within a mile of here is a strong manor; by that manor, on the left hand, is a fair ford for horses to drink at; over that ford there grows a spreading tree; and on that tree hang many shields which good knights once wielded. On the trunk of the tree you will see a basin of brass and copper, and if you seek an adventure you have but to strike that basin thrice with the butt of your spear. If then you do not soon hear tidings of interest, you will have the best fortune of any knight who has passed through this forest for many a long year."

"Gramercy, for your tidings," said Hector, and rode rapidly on.

Soon he came to the manor and the tree, and saw the shields of which the forester had told him, and to his surprise and grief he noted among them the shield of his brother Lionel, and many more that he knew belonged to Round Table

knights. Then, with a heart full of thoughts of revenge, he beat upon the basin roundly with his spear, until its clang rung far and wide. This done, he turned his horse and let him drink at the ford.

As he stood there he heard a loud voice behind him, bidding him come out of the water and make ready, and looking round he beheld a powerfully-built knight on a strong horse.

Hector wheeled his horse sharply, and putting his spear in rest rode furiously upon this knight, striking him so fierce a blow that his horse turned twice around.

"Well done," said the stranger. "That was a knightly blow. But beware, it is my turn now."

As he spoke he spurred his horse at full speed upon Hector, and struck him so skilfully that the spear-head passed under his right arm and bore him clear of the saddle into the air. Then, carrying the knight like a trussed hare on his spear, the victor rode onward into his own open hall, and flung his captive down in the middle of the floor.

"You have done more to me than any knight has done for twelve years past," said the victor, whose name was Sir Turquine. "Therefore I will grant you your life and the liberty of the castle, but you must swear to be my prisoner until death."

"That will I never promise," said Hector. "I will remain captive to no man if I can free myself."

"Then I shall take care that you do not escape," said Turquine.

With these words he made Hector, on pain of death, remove his armor, and then scourged him with thorns as he had done the others, and flung him into the prison where lay so many of his fellows.

When Hector saw his brother Lionel among these his heart was ready to break with sorrow.

"What has happened to Lancelot?" he demanded. "You rode with him, and here you are a prisoner. Alas! tell me not that any harm has come to him."

"Where he is and what he does I cannot tell," said Lionel. "I left him asleep under an apple-tree and rode alone on this dolorous venture. Would that I had wakened him first."

"Alas!" cried the knights, "we may never be delivered unless Lancelot comes to our aid. Of all knights living we know none but him who is a fair match for Turquine, our robber lord."

CHAPTER II.

THE CONTEST OF THE FOUR QUEENS.

Noon had passed by, but the day was still warm, and Lancelot lay yet in deep slumber, dreaming nothing of what had happened while he slept. But now there rode by the apple-tree

under which he lay a royal and brilliant cavalcade. For in it were four queens of high estate, who were mounted on white mules, and attired in regal robes, while beside them rode four knights who bore on their spear-points a cloth of green silk, so held as to shield the queens from the heat of the sun.

As they rode by Lancelot's place of slumber they were startled by the loud neigh of a war-horse, and looking about them they became aware of the sleeping knight beneath the apple-tree. They drew near and looked upon his face, and at once knew him for Lancelot du Lake. Then they began pleasantly to strive as to which of them should have the sleeping knight for her lover.

"Let me settle this debate," said Morgan le Fay, who was one of the queens. "I shall by enchantment make his sleep hold for six hours to come, and shall have him borne to my castle. When he is safely within my power I shall remove the enchantment, and then he shall be made to choose which of us he will have for his love. If he refuse us all he shall pay the penalty."

She did as she had said. Lancelot was laid sleeping upon his shield and borne on horseback between two knights, and so brought to a castle named Chariot, where he was laid, still slumbering, in a chamber. At night-fall a fair damsel was sent to him with his supper ready prepared. By that time the enchantment was past, and

Lancelot woke as the damsel came into his chamber and asked him how he fared.

"That I am not ready to say," answered Lancelot; "for I know not how I came into this castle unless it were by enchantment."

"As to that I cannot speak," she replied. "I can but bid you eat. If you be such a knight as men say, I shall tell you more to-morrow morn."

"Thanks, fair damsel," said Lancelot. "It pleases me to have your good will."

Little comfort had the good knight of that night's sleep; but early in the morning there came to him the four queens, each dressed in her richest attire, adorned with rare jewels, and as beautiful as art and skill could make them.

They bade him good morning and he returned their greeting, looking upon them with eyes of admiration, but not of love.

"You are our prisoner, sir knight," said Morgan. "We know you well. You are Lancelot of the Lake, King Ban's son. And well we understand that you are named the worthiest knight living, and that men say that no lady in the land but Queen Guenever can have your love. But this we would have you know, that you must choose one of us four as your heart's queen, for if you refuse you shall never see Arthur's queen again. I am Morgan le Fay, queen of the land of Gore, and here is the Queen of Northgalis, the Queen of Eastland, and the Queen of the Out Islands. We bid you to forget Guenever and

choose of us the one you will have for your love. If you choose not it will be worse for you, for I shall hold you in prison until death."

"This is a hard chance," said Lancelot, "that I must die in prison or profess a love that I do not feel. Let me tell you this, though I die twice in your dungeon I will have none of you, for you are false enchantresses and not true dames for honest men to love. As for dame Guenever, were I at liberty I would prove it on all the knights whom you command that she is of all ladies the truest to her lord."

"Is this, then, your answer," said Morgan, "that you disdain our love?"

"On my life it is!" cried Lancelot. "Such love as yours is not for honest knights; and my love is not to be had for the bidding."

"You may live to change your mind," said Morgan. "Prison life and prison fare may cure your pride."

With these words they departed, leaving Lancelot in gloom of mind but steadfastness of heart.

At noon, the damsel who had brought him his supper the night before came with his dinner, and asked him again how he fared.

"Never so ill," said Lancelot. "For never before was I held under lock and key, and never was worthy knight so shamefully entreated."

"It grieves me deeply to see you in such distress," she said. "If you will be ruled by me,

and make me a promise, you shall be set free from this prison, though at the risk of my life."

"I will grant your wish if it be in my power," said Lancelot. "These queenly sorceresses have destroyed many a good knight, and I would give much to be out of their hands."

"They crave your love from what they have heard of your honor and renown," answered the damsel. "They say your name is Lancelot du Lake, the flower of knights, and your refusal of their love has filled their souls with anger. But for my aid you might die in their hands. The promise I ask is this. On Tuesday morning next there is to be a tournament between my father and the King of Northgalis. My father was lately overpowered by three of Arthur's knights, and if you will be there and help him in this coming fray I will engage to deliver you from your bondage at dawn to-morrow."

"Tell me your father's name," said Lancelot, "and then you shall have my answer."

"His name is King Bagdemagus."

"I know him well," said Lancelot. "He is a noble king and a good knight. By the faith of my body, I promise to give him what aid I can."

"A hundred thanks, dear sir," she said. "Be ready to-morrow early. I shall be here to deliver you, and take you to where you can find your horse and armor. Within ten miles of this castle is an abbey of white monks. There I beg you to stay and thither I shall bring my father to you."

"As I am a true knight you can trust me," said Lancelot.

With this the damsel departed. But at early dawn of the next day she came again, as she had promised, and found Lancelot ready and eager for flight. Then they crept through hall and passage, with heedful tread and bated breath, until she had opened twelve locked doors and reached the castle yard.

The sun was just giving its rose tints to the east when she brought him to the place where his horse and armor were kept, and with hasty fingers helped him to arm. Then, taking a great spear and mounting his noble steed, Lancelot rode forth, saying cheerily,—

"Fair damsel, by the grace of God I shall not fail you."

And still slumber lay deep upon the castle, and not one of the queens nor a soul of those who dwelt therein was wakened by the sound.

But not far had the escaping knight departed from the castle before he entered a thick forest, in whose depths he wandered lost all that day, finding no high road, and no trace of the abbey of white monks. Night at length came upon him, and now he found himself in a valley where he saw a pavilion of red sendal.

"Fortune aids me," said Lancelot. "Whoever owns that pavilion, it shall give me shelter for the night."

He thereupon alighted, tied his horse to a tree

near by, and entered the pavilion, in which was a comfortable bed. Disarming, he laid himself therein, and very soon was lost in heavy slumber.

Within an hour afterwards the knight who owned the pavilion came thither, and laid himself upon the bed without noticing that it was already occupied. His entrance wakened Lancelot, who, on feeling this intrusion, sprang in quick alarm from the bed and grasped his sword. The other knight, no less alarmed, did the same, and sword in hand they rushed out from the pavilion into the open air, and fell into mortal combat by the side of a little stream that there ran past.

The fight was quickly at an end, for after a few passes the knight of the pavilion fell to the earth, wounded nearly unto death.

"I yield me, sir knight," he cried. "But I fear I have fought my last."

"Why came you into my bed?" demanded Lancelot.

"The pavilion is my own," said the knight. "It is ill fortune that I should die for seeking my own bed."

"Then I am sorry to have hurt you," said Lancelot. "I have lately been beguiled by treason, and was in dread of it. Come into the pavilion. It may be that I can stanch your blood."

They entered the pavilion, where Lancelot, with skilful hands, dressed the knight's wound and stopped the bleeding. As he did so the knight's lady entered the pavilion, and fell into

deep lamentation and accusal of Lancelot, on seeing how sorely her lord was hurt.

"Peace, my lady and love," said the knight. "This is a worthy and honorable gentleman. I am in fault for my hurt, and he has saved my life by his skill and care."

"Will you tell me what knight you are?" asked the lady.

"Fair lady," he replied, "my name is Lancelot du Lake."

"So your face and voice told me," she replied, "for I have seen you often, and know you better than you deem. And I would ask of your courtesy, for the harm you have done to my lord Beleus and the grief you have given me, that you will cause my lord to be made a Knight of the Round Table. This I can say for him, that he is a man of warlike prowess, and the lord of many islands."

"Let him come to the court at the next high feast," said Lancelot; "and come you with him. I shall do what I can for him, and if he prove as good a knight as you say, I doubt not but King Arthur will grant your request."

While they still talked the night passed and the day dawned. Then Lancelot armed himself, and asking of them the way to the abbey, rode thither, where he arrived within the space of two hours.

As Lancelot rode within the abbey yard, the damsel to whom he owed his deliverance from the prison of Morgan le Fay sprang from a couch and

ran to a window, roused by the loud clang of hoofs upon the pavement.

Seeing who it was, she hurried gladly down, and bade some of the men to take his horse to the stable, and others to lead him to a chamber, whither she sent him a robe to wear when he had laid off his armor.

Then she entered the chamber and bade him heartily welcome, saying that of all knights in the world he was the one she most wished to see. Ordering breakfast to be prepared for the hungry knight, she sent in haste for her father, who was within twelve miles of the abbey. Before eventide he came, and with him a fair following of knights.

As soon as King Bagdemagus reached the abbey, he went straight to the room where were Lancelot and his daughter in conversation, and took Lancelot in his arms, bidding him warmly welcome.

In the talk that followed, Lancelot told the king of his late adventures, the loss of his nephew Lionel, his own betrayal, and his rescue by the maiden, his daughter: "For which," he said, "I owe my best service to her and hers while I live."

"Then can I trust in your help on Tuesday next?" asked the king.

"That I have already promised your daughter," said Lancelot. "I shall not fail. But she tells me that in your last bout you lost the field

through three of King Arthur's knights, who aided the King of Northgalis, and that it is against these knights you need assistance. What knights were they?"

"They were Sir Mador de la Porte, Sir Mordred, and Sir Gahalatine. Do what we could, neither I nor my knights could make head against them."

"I would not have them know me," said Lancelot. "My plan, therefore, is this. Send me here three of your best knights, and see that they have white shields, with no device, and that I also have such a shield. Then shall we four, when the fight is well on, come out of a wood into the midst of the fray, and do what we can to defeat these champions."

This plan was carried out as Lancelot had devised. On the day fixed for the tournament he, with his three white-shielded companions, placed himself in ambush in a leafy grove near where the lists were raised. Around the field were rows of benches where the spectators might sit, and richly-adorned seats for the lords and ladies who were to adjudge the combat and award the prize of skill and valor.

Then into the lists rode the King of Northgalis, with a following of fourscore knights, and attended by the three knights of Arthur's court, who stood apart by themselves. Into the opposite side of the lists rode King Bagdemagus, with as many knights in his train.

When all were in place the signal for the onset

was given, and the knights put their spears in rest and rode together with a great rush, and with such fatal fortune that twelve of the party of Bagdemagus and six of that of Northgalis were slain at the first encounter, while the knights of King Bagdemagus were driven back in disorder.

At this critical juncture Lancelot and his companions broke from their concealment and rode into the lists, forcing their horses into the thick of the press. Then Lancelot did deeds of such marvellous strength and skill that all men deeply wondered who could be the valiant knight of the white shield. For with one spear he smote down five knights, with such force that four of them broke their backs in the fall. Then turning on the King of Northgalis, he hurled him from his horse and broke his thigh.

The three knights of Arthur's court, who had not yet joined in the fray, saw this, and rode forward.

"A shrewd guest that," said Mador. "Let me have at him."

But his fortune was not equal to his hopes, for Lancelot bore down horse and man, so that Mador's shoulder was put out of joint by the fall.

"Now is my turn," said Mordred.

He rode fiercely on Lancelot, who turned nimbly and met him in full career, Mordred's spear shivering unto his hand when it struck the firm white shield. But Lancelot gave him so shrewd a buffet that the bow of his saddle broke, and he was

flung over his horse's tail with such violence that his helmet went more than a foot into the earth. Fortune saved him from a broken neck, but he lay long in a swoon.

Then Gahalatine and Lancelot rode together with all their force, the spears of both breaking, but both keeping their seats. They now drew their swords, and struck each other many a keen blow. At length Lancelot, with a burst of wrath, smote Gahalatine so fierce a stroke on the helm that blood burst from his nose, mouth, and ears, and his head drooped on his breast. His horse ran in fright from the fray, while he fell headlong from his saddle to the ground.

Lancelot now drew back and received from the attendants a stout, strong spear, and with this rode again into the fray. Before that spear broke he had unhorsed sixteen knights, some of them being borne from their saddles, while others were hurled horse and man together to the earth. Then getting another spear he unhorsed twelve more knights, some of whom never throve afterwards. This ended the tournament, for the knights of Northgalis refused to fight any longer against a champion of such mighty prowess, and the prize was awarded to King Bagdemagus.

Lancelot now rode with King Bagdemagus from the lists to his castle, where they had great feasting and rejoicing, and where Lancelot was proffered rich gifts for the noble service he had rendered. But these he refused to accept.

On the following morning Lancelot took his leave, saying that he must go in search of Lionel, who had vanished from his side during his sleep. But before going he commended all present to God's grace, and said to the king's daughter,—

"If you have need any time of my service I pray you let me know, and I shall not fail you, as I am a true knight."

And so Lancelot departed, having had strange adventures and won much renown since he had parted from his nephew Lionel.

CHAPTER III.

HOW LANCELOT AND TURQUINE FOUGHT.

Not far nor long had Lancelot ridden before he found himself in familiar scenes, and in a short time he beheld that same apple-tree under which he had lain asleep.

"I shall take care never to sleep again beneath your shade," he said, grimly. "The fruit you bear is not wholesome for errant knights."

He rode by it, but had not followed the highway far when he met a damsel riding on a white palfrey, who saluted him. He courteously returned her salute, and said,—

"Fair damsel, know you of any adventures that may be had in this land?"

"Sir knight," she replied, "if you crave adventures you will not need to go far to find one. But

it is one it might be safest for you not to undertake."

"Why should I not?" said Lancelot. "I came here seeking adventures, and am not the man to turn back from a shadow."

"You seem to be a good knight," she replied, regarding him closely. "If you dare face a powerful fighter, I can bring you where is the best and mightiest in this land. But first I would know what knight you are."

"As for my name, you are welcome to it," he replied. "Men call me Lancelot du Lake."

"This, then, is the adventure. Near by there dwells a knight who has never yet found his match, and who is ever ready for a joust. His name is Sir Turquine. As I am told, he has overcome and has in prison in his castle sixty-four knights of Arthur's court, whom he has met and vanquished in single combat. You shall fight with him if you will. And if you overcome him, then I shall beg for your aid against a false knight who daily distresses me and other damsels. Have I your promise?"

"There is nothing I would rather do," said Lancelot. "Bring me now where I may meet this Turquine. When I have ended with him I shall be at your service."

"Come this way," she replied, and led him to the ford and the tree where hung the basin.

Lancelot waited here until his horse had drunk, and then he beat on the basin with the butt of his

spear with such force that its bottom fell out, but no one answered his challenge. He knocked then loudly at the manor gates, but they remained closed. Finding no entrance, he rode for half an hour along the manor walls, looking heedfully for Sir Turquine, whom he fancied must be abroad. At the end of that time he saw a knight who drove a horse before him, and athwart that horse lay an armed knight, bound.

As they drew near, Lancelot noticed something familiar in the aspect of the bound knight, and when they had come close he recognized him as Gaheris, the brother of Gawaine, and a Knight of the Round Table.

"That prisoner is a fellow of mine," he said to the damsel. "I shall begin, I promise you, by God's help, with rescuing him; and unless his captor sit better than I in the saddle, I shall deliver all his prisoners, among whom, I am sure, are some of my near kindred."

By this time Turquine was close at hand, and on seeing an armed knight thus confront him he drew up his horse and gripped his spear fiercely.

"Fair sir," said Lancelot, "put down that wounded knight and let him rest a while, while you and I find out who is the better man. I am told you have done much wrong to Knights of the Round Table, and I am here to revenge them. Therefore, defend yourself."

"If you be of the Round Table," said Turquine, "I defy you and all your fellowship."

"That is easy to say," retorted Lancelot. "Now let me see what you are ready to do."

Then, they put their spears in the rests, and rode together with the force of two ships meeting in mid-ocean, smiting each other so strongly in the midst of their shields that the backs of both horses broke beneath them. The knights, astonished at this result, leaped hastily to the ground to avoid being overthrown.

Then, drawing their swords and bearing their shields in front, they came hotly together, striking with such force that shield and armor alike gave way beneath the mighty blows, and blood soon began to flow freely from their wounds. Thus for two hours and more the deadly contest continued, the knights striking, parrying, advancing, and retiring with all the skill of perfect swordsmen. At the last they both paused through lack of breath, and stood leaning upon their swords, and facing each other grimly.

"Hold thy hand a while, fellow," said Turquine, "and tell me what I shall ask thee."

"Say on," rejoined Lancelot, briefly.

"Thou art the strongest and best-breathed man that ever I met with, and art much like the knight that I hate most of all men. If you are not he, then for the esteem I have for you I will release all my prisoners, and we shall be fellows together while we live. But first of all I would know your name."

"You speak well," said Lancelot. "But since

you promise me your friendship, tell me what knight it is you hate so deeply?"

"His name," said Turquine, "is Lancelot du Lake. He slew my brother Carados at the dolorous tower, and I have vowed that, if I should meet him, one of us shall make an end of the other. Through hate of him I have slain a hundred knights, and maimed as many more, while of those I have thrown in prison, many are dead, and threescore and four yet live. If you will tell me your name, and it be not Lancelot, all these shall be delivered."

"It stands, then," said Lancelot, "that if I be one man I may have your peace and friendship, and if I be another man there will be mortal war between us. If you would know my name, it is Lancelot du Lake, son of King Ban of Benwick, and Knight of the Table Round. And now do your best, for I defy you."

"Ah, Lancelot!" said Turquine, "never was knight so welcome to me. This is the meeting I have long sought, and we shall never part till one of us be dead."

Then they rushed together like two wild bulls, lashing at each other with shield and sword, and striking such fiery blows that pieces of steel flew from their armor of proof, and blood poured from many new wounds.

Two hours longer the fight continued, Turquine giving Lancelot many wounds and receiving stinging blows in return, till at the end he drew

back faint with loss of breath and of blood, and bore his shield low through weakness. This Lancelot quickly perceived, and leaped fiercely upon him, seizing him by the beaver of his helmet and dragging him down to his knees. Then he tore off his helm, and swinging in the air his fatal blade, smote off his head so that it leaped like a live thing upon the ground, while the body fell prostrate in death.

"So much for Turquine," said Lancelot. "He will take prisoner no more Round Table knights. But by my faith, there are not many such men as he, and he and I might have faced the world. Now, damsel, I am ready to go with you where you will, but I have no horse."

"Take that of this wounded knight; and let him go into the manor and release the prisoners."

"That is well advised," said Lancelot, who thereupon went to Gaheris and begged that he would lend him his horse.

"Lend it!" cried Gaheris. "I will give it, and would give ten if I had them, for I owe my life and my horse both to you. You have slain in my sight the mightiest man and the best knight that I ever saw, except yourself. And, fair sir, I pray you tell me your name?"

"My name is Lancelot du Lake. I owe you rescue for King Arthur's sake, and for that of Gawaine, your brother and my comrade. Within that manor you will find many Knights of the Round Table, whose shields you may see on yon-

der tree. I pray you greet them all from me, and say I bid them take for their own such stuff as they find there. I must ride on with this damsel to keep my promise, but I hope to be back at the court by the feast of Pentecost. Bid Lionel and Hector await me there."

This said, he mounted and rode on, while Gaheris went into the manor-house. Here he found a yeoman porter, who accosted him surlily. Gaheris flung the dogged fellow to the floor, and took from him his keys. With these he opened the prison doors and released the captives, who thanked him warmly for their rescue, for they saw that he was wounded, and deemed that he had vanquished Turquine.

"It was not I," said Gaheris, "that slew your tyrant. You have Lancelot to thank for that. He greets you all, and asks Lionel and Hector to wait for him at the court."

"That we shall not do," said they. "While we live we shall seek him."

"So shall I," said Kay, who was among the prisoners, "as I am a true knight."

Then the released knights sought their armor and horses, and as they did so a forester rode into the court, with four horses laden with fat venison.

"Here is for us," said Kay. "We have not had such a repast as this promises for many a long day. That rogue Turquine owes us a dinner at least."

Then the manor-kitchens were set in a blaze,

and the venison was roasted, baked, and sodden, the half-starved knights enjoying such a hearty meal as they had long been without. Some of them afterwards stayed in the manor-house for the night, though in more agreeable quarters than they had of late occupied. But Lionel, Hector, and Kay rode in quest of Lancelot, resolved to find him if it were possible, and to lose no time in the search.

As for the victorious knight, he had many strange adventures, of which we can tell only those of most interest. First of all, he performed the task which the damsel required of him, for he met and killed that false knight against whom she prayed for redress.

"You have done this day a double service to mankind," said the damsel, gratefully. "As Turquine destroyed knights, so did this villain, whose name was Peris de Forest Savage, destroy and distress ladies and gentlewomen, and he is well repaid for his villany."

"Do you want any more service of me?" asked Lancelot.

"Not at this time. But may heaven preserve you wherever you go, for you deserve the prayers of all who are in distress. But one thing, it seems to me, you lack: you are a wifeless knight. The world says that you will love no maiden, but that your heart is turned only to Queen Guenever, who has ordained by enchantment that you shall love none but her. This I hold to be a great

pity, and many in the land are sorry to see so noble a knight so enchained."

"I cannot stop people from thinking what they will," said Lancelot, "but as for marrying, I shall not soon consent to be a stay-at-home knight. And as for Guenever's enchantment, it is only that of beauty and womanly graciousness. What time may bring me I know not, but as yet it has not brought me a fancy for wedded life. I thank you for your good wishes, fair damsel, and courteously bid you farewell."

With these words Lancelot and she parted, she seeking her home, and the knight riding in quest of new adventures. For two days his journey continued, through a country strange to him. On the morning of the third day he found himself beside a wide stream, which was crossed by a long bridge, beyond which rose the battlemented towers of a strong castle.

Lancelot rode upon the bridge, but before he had reached its middle there started out a foul-faced churl, who smote his horse a hard blow on the nose, and asked him surlily why he dared cross that bridge without license.

"Why should I not, if I wish?" asked the knight. "Who has the right to hinder?"

"I have," cried the churl. "You may choose what you will, but you shall not ride here," and he struck at him furiously with a great iron-shod club.

At this affront Lancelot angrily drew his sword,

and with one stroke warded off the blow, and cut the churl's head in twain.

"So much for you, fool," he said.

But when he reached the end of the bridge he found there a village, whose people cried out o him, "You have done a sorry deed for yourself, for you have slain the chief porter of our castle.'

Lancelot rode on, heedless of their cries, and forcing his great horse through the throng till he came to the castle walls. The gates of these stood open, and he rode in, where he saw a fair green court, and beyond it the stately walls and towers. At the windows were the faces of many people, who cried to him in dismay,—

"Fair knight, turn and fly. Death awaits you here."

"Fly! I have not learned how," answered Lancelot, as he sprang from his horse and tied him to a ring in the wall. "This court seems a fair place for knightly combat, and it fits better with my mood to fight than fly."

Hardly had he spoken when from the castle doors came two strong giants, armed all but their heads, and bearing as weapons great iron clubs. They set upon Lancelot together, the foremost making a stroke that would have slain him had it reached him. But the knight warded it off with his shield, and agilely returned the blow with his sword, with so vigorous a stroke that he cleft the giant's head in twain.

When his fellow saw this, he turned and ran in

panic fear, but Lancelot furiously pursued him, and struck him so fierce a blow that the sword clove his great body asunder from shoulder to waist.

"Is it not better to fight than to fly?" cried Lancelot to the glad faces which he now saw at the windows, and, leaving the dead giants crimsoning the green verdure, he strode into the castle hall, where there came before him threescore ladies, who fell on their knees and thanked God and him for their deliverance.

"Blessed be the day thou wert born, sir knight," they said, "for many brave warriors have died in seeking to do what thou hast achieved this day. We are all of us gentlewomen born, and many of us have been prisoners here for seven years, working in silk for these giants that we might earn our food. We pray you to tell us your name, that our friends may know who has delivered us, and remember you in their prayers."

"Fair ladies," he said, "my name is Lancelot du Lake."

"You may well be he," they replied. "For we know no other knight that could have faced those giants together, and slain them as you have done."

"Say unto your friends," said Lancelot, "that I send them greeting, and that I shall expect good cheer from them if ever I should come into their manors. As for the treasure in this castle, I give it to you in payment for your captivity. For the castle itself, its lord, whom these giants have dispossessed, may claim again his heritage."

"The castle," they replied, "is named Tintagil. The duke who owned it was the husband of Queen Igraine, King Arthur's mother. But it has long been held by these miscreant giants."

"Then," said Lancelot, "the castle belongs to the king, and shall be returned to him. And now farewell, and God be with you."

So saying, he mounted his horse and rode away, followed by the thanks and prayers of the rescued ladies.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHAPEL PERILOUS.

LANCELOT rode onward day after day, passing through many strange and wild countries, and over many rivers, and finding but sorry cheer and ill lodging as he went. At length fortune brought him to a comfortable wayside mansion, where he was well received, and after a good supper was lodged in a chamber over the gateway.

But he had not been long asleep when he was aroused by a furious knocking at the gate. Springing from his bed, he looked from the window, and there by the moonlight saw one knight defending himself against three, who were pressing him closely. The knight fought bravely, but was in danger of being overpowered.

"Those are not fair odds," said Lancelot. "I

must to the rescue, and the more so as I see that it is my old friend, Sir Kay, who is being so roughly handled."

Then he hastily put on his armor, and by aid of a sheet lowered himself from a window to the ground.

"Turn this way," he cried to the assailants, "and leave that knight. Three to one is not knightly odds."

At these words they turned upon him, all three striking at him together, and forcing him to defend himself. Kay would have come to his aid, but he cried out,—

"I will have none of your help. Stand off and leave me alone, or fight them yourself."

At this Kay stood aside, and Lancelot attacked the three miscreants so fiercely that within six strokes he felled them all to the ground. They now begged for mercy, yielding to him as a man of matchless skill.

"I will not take your yielding," he replied. "Yield to Sir Kay, here, whom you foully overmatched."

"You ask too much of us, fair sir. It is not just that we should yield to him whom we would have vanquished but for you."

"Think well," returned Lancelot. "You shall yield or die. The choice is yours."

"That is a choice with but one side. Yield we must, if death is the alternative."

"Then I bid you on Whitsunday next, to pre-

sent yourselves to Queen Guenever at King Arthur's court, and put yourselves in her grace and mercy, saying that Sir Kay sent you there as prisoners."

This they took oath to do, each knight swearing upon his sword; whereupon Lancelot suffered them to depart.

He now knocked at the gate with the pommel of his sword, till his host came, who started with surprise on seeing him there.

"I thought you were safe a-bed," he said.

"So I was. But I sprang from the window to help an old fellow of mine."

When they came to the light, Kay recognized Lancelot, and fell on his knees to thank him for saving his life.

"What I have done is nothing but what duty and good fellowship demanded," said Lancelot. "Are you hungry?"

"Half starved," answered Kay."

"Mayhap our good host can find you food."

Meat was thereupon brought, of which Kay eat heartily, after which he and Lancelot sought their beds in the gate chamber.

But in the morning Lancelot rose while Kay was still asleep, and took his guest's armor and shield, leaving his own. Then he proceeded to the stable, mounted his horse, and rode away. Shortly afterwards Kay awoke, and quickly perceived what his comrade had done.

"Good," he said, with a laugh. "Lancelot is

after some sport. I fancy that more than one knight will get more than he bargains for if he thinks he has me to deal with. As for me, with Lancelot's armor and shield, I shall be left to ride in peace, for few, I fancy, will trouble me."

Kay thereupon put on Lancelot's armor, and, thanking his host, rode away. Meanwhile Lancelot had ridden on till he found himself in a low country full of meadows and rivers. Here he passed a bridge at whose end were three pavilions of silk and sendal, and at the door of each a white shield on the truncheon of a spear, while three squires stood at the pavilion doors. Lancelot rode leisurely by, without a word and hardly a look.

When he had passed, the knights looked after him, saying to one another, "That is the proud Kay. He deems no knight so good as he, though it has often been proved otherwise."

"I shall ride after him," said one. "We shall see if his pride does not have a fall. Watch me, comrades, if you would see some sport."

He sped but poorly, as it proved, for within a short time he was hurled grovelling to the earth. Then the two others rode in succession against the disguised knight, and both met with the same sorry fate.

"You are not Kay, the seneschal," they cried. "He never struck such blows. Tell us your name and we will yield."

"You shall yield, whether you will or not," he

replied. "Look that you be at court by Whitsunday, and yield yourselves to Queen Guenever, saying to her that Sir Kay sent you thither as prisoners."

This they swore to do, in dread of worse handling, and Lancelot rode on, leaving them to help themselves as best they might. Not far had he gone when he entered a forest, and in an open glade of this saw four knights resting under an oak. He knew them at sight to be from Arthur's court, two of them being Gawaine and Uwaine; the other two Hector de Maris, and Sagramour le Desirous.

They, as the three previous knights had done, mistook Lancelot for Kay, and Sagramour rode after him, vowing that he would try what skill the seneschal had. He quickly found, for horse and man together were hurled to the ground, while Lancelot sat unmoved in his saddle.

"I would have sworn that Kay could not give such a buffet as that," said Hector. "Let us see what I can do with him."

His luck was even worse, for he went to the earth with a spear-hole in his shoulder, his shield and armor being pierced.

"By my faith!" said Uwaine, "that knight is a bigger and stronger man than Kay. He must have slain the seneschal and taken his armor. He has proved himself a hard man to match, but if Kay has been slain it is our duty to revenge him."

He thereupon rode against Lancelot, but with

as ill fortune as his fellows, for he was flung so violently to the earth that he lay long out of his senses.

"Whoever he be," cried Gawaine, "he has overturned my comrades, and I must encounter him. Defend yourself, sir knight."

Then the two knights rode fiercely together, each striking the other in the midst of the shield. But Gawaine's spear broke, while that of Lancelot held good, and struck so strong a blow that the horse was overturned, Gawaine barely escaping being crushed beneath him.

This done, Lancelot rode slowly on, smiling to himself, and saying, "God give joy to the man that made this spear, for a better no knight ever handled."

"What say you of this knight, who with one spear has felled us all?" said Gawaine. "To my thinking, it is Lancelot or the devil. He rides like Lancelot."

"We shall find out in good time," said the others; "but he has left us sore bodies and sick hearts, and our poor horses are the worse for the trial."

Lancelot rode on through the forest, thinking quietly to himself of the surprise he had given to his late assailants, and of the sport it would thereafter make in the court. But new and stranger adventures awaited him, for he was now coming into a land of enchantment, where more than mere strength would be needed.

What he saw, after he had ridden long and far, was a black brachet, which was coursing as if in the track of a hurt deer; but he quickly perceived that the dog was upon a trail of fresh blood. He followed the brachet, which looked behind as it ran, as if with desire to lead him on. In time he saw before him an old manor, over whose bridge ran the dog. When Lancelot had ridden over the bridge, that shook beneath his hoofs as if it was ready to fall, he came into a great hall, where lay a dead knight whose wounds the dog was licking. As he stood there a lady rushed weeping from a chamber, and wrung her hands in grief as she accused him of having slain her lord.

"Madam, it was not I," said Lancelot. "I never saw him till his dog led me here, and I am sorry enough for your misfortune."

"I should have known it could not be you," she said. "I was led by my grief to speak wildly. For he that killed my husband is sorely wounded himself, and I can promise him this, that he will never recover. I have wrought him a charm that no leech's skill can overcome."

"What was your husband's name?" asked Lancelot.

"Sir Gilbert," she replied. "As for him that slew him, I know not his name."

"God send you better comfort," said Lancelot. "I am sorry for your misfortune."

Then he rode again into the forest, and in a

short space met a damsel who knew him well, for his visor was up and his face shown.

"You are well found, my lord Lancelot," she said. "I beg you of your knighthood to help my brother, who lies near by sorely wounded, and never stops bleeding. He fought to-day with Sir Gilbert and slew him in fair battle, and now is dying through foul enchantment. Not far from here dwells a lady sorceress, who has wrought this harm, and who told me to-day that my brother's wounds would never heal till I could find a knight who would go into the Chapel Perilous, and bring thence the sword of the slain knight and a piece of the bloody cloth that he is wrapped in. My brother will die unless his wounds are touched with that sword and that cloth, for nothing else on earth will stop their bleeding."

"This is a marvellous tale," said Lancelot. "Who is your brother?"

"His name is Meliot de Logres."

"Then he is one of my fellows of the Round Table, and I will do all I can to help him. What and where the Chapel Perilous is I know not, but I do not fear its perils."

"This highway will bring you to it, and at no great distance," she replied. "I shall here await your return. I know no knight but you who can achieve this task, and truly you will find it no light one, for you have enchantment and sorcery to encounter."

Little was Lancelot downcast by these words,

and he rode on to the Chapel Perilous with no dread in his bold heart. Reaching the building indicated, he alighted and tied his horse beside the gate. Then he entered the church-yard, and there he saw on the chapel front many shields hung upside down, some of them being well known to him.

But his eyes were quickly drawn from these, for suddenly there appeared before him thirty gigantic knights, all clad in jet-black armor, and every man of them a foot higher than common men. All bore swords and shields, and as they stood there they grinned and gnashed at him with baleful faces.

Dread came into Lancelot's heart on seeing this frightful throng of black warriors, with their demon-like countenances. But commending his soul to God, he took his sword in hand and advanced resolutely upon them. Then, to his surprise and gladness, when they saw this bold advance they scattered right and left before him, like dead leaves before the wind, and gave him open passage to the chapel, which he entered without further opposition.

Here was no light but that of a dim lamp, and on a bier in the centre of the aisle there lay a corpse that was covered with a cloth of silk. On coming up, Lancelot gazed upon the face and saw that it was that of Sir Gilbert, whose dead body he had seen but lately in the hall of the manor-house.

Then he bent over the corpse and cut away a piece of the silk, and as he did so he felt the floor to sink and rock beneath him as if the earth had quaked. This gave him a thrill of dread, and seizing the sword that lay by the side of the corpse he hastened out of the chapel.

When he reached the chapel-yard the black knights thronged again in his pathway, and cried to him with voices of thunder,—

"Knight, yield us that sword, or you shall die!"

"Whether I live or die, it will need more than loud words to force me to yield it. You may fight for it if you will. And I warn you, you will need to fight hard."

Then, as before, they scattered before his bold advance, and left him free passage. Lancelot strode resolutely on through the chapel-yard, but in the highway beyond he met a fair damsel, who said to him,—

"Sir Lancelot, you know not what risk you run. Leave that sword, or you will die for it."

"I got it not so easy that I should leave it for a threat," he replied.

"You are wise," she answered. "I did but test your judgment. If you had yielded the sword you would never have looked on Queen Guenever again."

"Then I would have been a fool indeed to leave it."

"Now, gentle knight, I have but one request to

make of you ere you depart. That is, that you kiss me."

"Nay," said Lancelot, "that God forbid. I save my kisses till my love is given."

"Then are you beyond my power," she cried, with a groan of pain. "Had you kissed me your life would have ended; but now I have lost my labor, for it was for you and Gawaine that I prepared this chapel with its enchantments. Gawaine was once in my power, and at that time he fought with Sir Gilbert and struck off his left hand. As for you, I have loved you these seven years. But I know that none but Guenever will ever have your love, and so, as I could not have you alive, I wished to have you dead. If you had yielded to my wiles I should have embalmed and preserved your body, and kissed it daily in spite of Guenever, or any woman living. Now farewell, Lancelot; I shall never look upon your face again."

"I pray to Heaven you shall not. And may God preserve me from your vile craft."

Mounting his horse, Lancelot departed. Of the lady, we are told by the chronicles that she died within a fortnight of pure sorrow, and that she was a sorceress of high renown.

Lancelot rode on till he met the sister of the wounded knight, who clapped her hands and wept for joy on seeing him safely returned. Then she led him to a castle near by, where Sir Meliot lay. Lancelot knew him at sight, though he was pale as death from loss of blood.

On seeing Lancelot, he fell on his knees before him, crying, in tones of hope,—

"Oh, my lord Lancelot, help me, for you alone can!"

"I can and will," rejoined the knight, and, as he had been advised, he touched his wounds with the sword and rubbed them with the bloody cloth he had won.

No sooner was this done, than Meliot sprang to his feet a whole and sound man, while his heart throbbed with joy and gratefulness. And he and his sister entertained their noble guest with the best the castle afforded, doing all in their power to show their gratitude.

CHAPTER V.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE FALCON.

After his departure from the castle of Sir Meliot, Lancelot rode through many strange regions, over marshes and highlands, through valleys and forests, and at length found himself in front of a handsome castle. This he passed, and as he did so thought he heard two bells ring.

Then he saw a falcon fly over his head towards a high elm, with long cords hanging from her feet, and as she perched in the elm these became coiled round a bough, so that when she tried to fly again

the lines held her and she hung downward by the legs.

Then there came a lady running from the castle, who cried, as she approached,—

"Oh, Lancelot, Lancelot, as thou art the flower of knights, help me to get my hawk, lest my lord destroy me! The hawk escaped me, and if my husband finds it gone, he is so hasty that I fear he will kill me."

"What is his name?" asked Lancelot.

"His name is Phelot. He is a knight of the king of Northgalis."

"Well, fair lady, since you know my name so well, and ask me on my knighthood to help you, I will try to get your hawk. But I am a poor climber, and the tree is high, with few boughs to help me."

"I trust you may," she replied, "for my life depends on your success."

Then Lancelot alighted and tied his horse to the tree, and begged the lady to help him remove his armor. When he was fully unarmed he climbed with much difficulty into the tree, and at length succeded in reaching the hawk. He now tied the lines to a rotten branch and threw it and the bird down to the lady.

But as she picked it up with a show of joy, there suddenly came from a grove an armed knight, who rode rapidly up, with his drawn sword in his hand.

"Now, Lancelot du Lake," he cried, "I have you as I wanted you. Your day has come."

And he stood by the trunk of the tree, ready to slay him when he should descend.

"What treason is this?" demanded Lancelot. "False woman, why have you led me into this?"

"She did as I bade her," said Phelot. "I hate you, Lancelot, and have laid this trap for you. You have fought your last fight, my bold champion, for you come out of that tree but to your death."

"That would be a shameful deed," cried Lancelot, "for you, an armed knight, to slay a defenceless man through treachery."

"Help yourself the best you can," said Phelot; "you get no grace from me."

"You will be shamed all your life by so base an act," cried Lancelot. "If you will do no more, at least hang my sword upon a bough where I may get it, and then you may do your best to slay me."

"No, no," said Phelot. "I know you too well for that. You get no weapon if I can hinder you."

Lancelot was now in the most desperate strait he was likely ever to endure. He could not stay forever in the tree, and if he should attempt to descend there stood that armed villain awaiting him with ready sword. What to do he knew not, but his eyes glanced warily round, till he saw just above him a big leafless branch, which he broke off close to the body of the tree. Thus armed, he climbed down to a lower bough, and looked down to note the position of the knight and his own horse.

A quick look told him that there was still a chance for life, and with a nimble leap he sprang to the ground on the other side of his horse from the knight.

Phelot at once struck at him savagely with his sword, thinking to kill him with the blow; but Lancelot parried it with his heavy club, and in return dealt his antagonist so fierce a blow on the head as to hurl him from his horse to the ground. Then wrenching the sword from his hand, he struck off his villanous head.

"Alas!" cried the lady, "you have slain my husband!"

"If I should slay you with him it would be but justice," said Lancelot, "for you would have killed me through falsehood and treachery, and you have but your deserts."

Then the lady swooned away as if she would die, but Lancelot, seeing that the knight's castle was so nigh, hastened to resume his armor, for he knew not what other treachery might await him. Then, leaving the lady still in a swoon, he mounted and rode away, thanking God that he had come so well through that deadly peril.

As to Lancelot's other adventures at that time, they were of no great moment. The chronicles tell that he saw a knight chasing a lady with intent to kill her, and that he rescued her. Afterwards the knight, who was her husband and mad with jealousy, struck off her head in Lancelot's presence.

Then when Lancelot would have slain him, he grovelled in the dirt and begged for mercy so piteously, that the knight at length granted him his shameful life, but made him swear that he would bear the dead body on his back to Queen Guenever, and tell her of his deed.

This he accomplished, and was ordered by the queen, as a fitting penance, to bear the body of his wife to the Pope of Rome and there beg absolution, and never to sleep at night but with the dead body in the bed with him. All this the knight did, and the body was buried in Rome by the Pope's command. Afterwards Pedivere, the knight, repented so deeply of his vile deed that he became a hermit, and was known as a man of holy life.

Two days before the feast of Pentecost, Lancelot returned to Camelot from his long journey and his many adventures. And there was much laughter in the court when the knights whom he had smitten down saw him in Kay's armor, and knew who their antagonist had been.

"By my faith," said Kay, "I never rode in such peace as I have done in Lancelot's armor, for I have not found a man willing to fight with me, and have ruled lord of the land."

Then the various knights whom Lancelot had bidden to seek the court came in, one by one, and all were glad to learn that it was by no common man that they had been overcome. Among them came Sir Belleus, whom Lancelot had wounded

at the pavilion, and who at his request was made a Knight of the Round Table, and Sir Meliot de Logres, whom he had rescued from the enchantment of the chapel perilous. Also the adventure of the four queens was told, and how Lancelot had been delivered from the power of the sorceresses, and had won the tournament for King Bagdemagus.

And so at that time Lancelot had the greatest name of any knight in the world, and was the most honored, by high and low alike, of all living champions.

BOOK V.

THE ADVENTURES OF BEAUMAINS.

CHAPTER I.

THE KNIGHTING OF KAY'S KITCHEN BOY.

King Arthur had, early in his reign, established the custom that at the feast of Pentecost he would never dine until he had seen or heard of some marvellous event. Through that custom many strange adventures were brought to his notice. It happened on one day of Pentecost that the king held his Round Table at a castle called Kinkenadon, on the borders of Wales. On that day, a little before noon, as Gawaine looked from a window, he saw three men on horseback and a dwarf on foot approaching the castle. When they came near the men alighted, and, leaving their horses in care of the dwarf, they walked towards the castle-gate. One of these men was very tall, being a foot and a half higher than his companions.

On seeing this, Gawaine went to the king and said,—

"Sire, I deem you can now safely go to your dinner, for I fancy we have an adventure at hand."

The king thereupon went to the table with his knights and the kings who were guests at his court. They were but well seated when there came into the hall two men, richly attired, upon whose shoulders leaned the fairest and handsomest young man that any there had ever seen. In body he was large and tall, with broad shoulders and sturdy limbs, yet he moved as if he could not bear himself erect, but needed support from his comrades' shoulders.

When Arthur saw this youth he bade those around him to make room, and the stranger with his companions walked up to the high dais without speaking.

Then he drew himself up straight and stood erect before the king.

"King Arthur," he said, "may God bless you and your fellowship, and, above all, the fellowship of the Round Table. I am come hither to beg of you three gifts, promising that they shall not be unreasonable, and that you can honorably grant them without hurt or loss to yourself. The first I shall ask now, and the other two this day twelvemonth."

"Ask what you will," said Arthur. "You shall have your gift, if it be so easy to grant."

"This is my first petition, that you furnish me meat and drink sufficient for this year, and until the time has come to ask for my other gifts."

"My fair son," said Arthur, "I counsel you to

ask more than this. If my judgment fail not, you are of good birth and fit for noble deeds."

"However that may be, I have asked all that I now desire."

"Well, well, you shall have meat and drink enough. I have never denied that to friend or foe. But what is your name?"

"Great sir, that I cannot tell you."

"There is a mystery here. A youth of so handsome face and vigorous form as you must be of noble parentage. But if you desire secrecy, I shall not press you."

Then Arthur bade Kay to take charge of the youth and see that he had the best fare of the castle, and to find out if he was a lord's son, if possible.

"A churl's son, I should say," answered Kay, scornfully, "and not worth the cost of his meals. Had he been of gentle birth he would have asked for horse and armor; but he demands that which fits his base-born nature. Since he has no name, I shall give him one. Let him be called Beaumains, or Fair Hands. I shall keep him in the kitchen, where he can have fat broth every day, so that at the year's end he will be fat as a swollen hog."

Then the two men departed and left the youth with Kay, who continued to scorn and mock him.

Gawaine and Lancelot were angry at this, and bade Kay to cease his mockery, saying that they were sure the youth would prove of merit.

"Never will he," said Kay. "He has asked as his nature bade him."

"Beware," said Lancelot. "This is not the first youth you have given a name in mockery, which turned on yourself at last."

"I do not fear that of this fellow. I wager that he has been brought up in some abbey, and came hither because good eating failed him there."

Kay then bade him get a place and sit down to his meal, and Beaumains sought a place at the hall-door among boys and menials.

Gawaine and Lancelot thereupon asked him to come to their chambers, where he should be well fed and lodged; but he refused, saying that he would do only as Kay commanded, since the king had so bidden.

It thus came about that Beaumains ate in the kitchen among the menials, and slept in sorry quarters. And during the whole year he was always meek and mild, and gave no cause for displeasure to man or child.

But whenever there was jousting of knights he was always present to see, and seemed in this sport to take great delight. And Gawaine and Lancelot, who felt sure that the youth but bided his time, gave him clothes and what money he needed. Also, wherever there were sports of skill or strength he was sure to be on hand, and in throwing the bar or stone he surpassed all contestants by two yards.

"How like you my boy of the kitchen?" Kay would say, on seeing these feats. "Fat broth is good for the muscles."

And so the year passed on till the festival of Whitsuntide came again. The court was now at Carlion, where royal feasts were held. But the king, as was his custom, refused to eat until he should hear of some strange adventure.

While he thus waited a damsel came into the hall and saluted the king, and begged aid and succor of him.

"For whom?" asked Arthur. "Of what do you complain?"

"Sire," she replied, "I serve a lady of great worth and merit, who is besieged in her castle by a tyrant, and dares not leave her gates for fear of him. I pray you send with me some knight to succor her."

"Who is your lady, and where does she dwell? And what is the name of the man who besieges her?"

"Her name I must not now tell. I shall only say that she has wide lands and is a noble lady. As for the tyrant that distresses her, he is called the Red Knight of the Red Lawns."

"I know him not," said the king.

"I know him well," said Gawaine. "Men say he has seven men's strength. I escaped him once barely with life."

"Fair damsel," said the king, "there are knights here who would do their utmost to rescue your

lady. But if you will not tell me her name nor where she lives, none of them shall go with my consent."

"Then I must seek further," said the damsel, "for that I am forbidden to tell."

At this moment Beaumains came to the king, and said,—

"Royal sir, I have been twelve months in your kitchen, and have had all you promised me; now I desire to ask for my other two gifts."

"Ask, if you will. I shall keep to my word."

"This, then, is what I request. First, that you send me with the damsel, for this adventure belongs to me."

"You shall have it," said the king.

"My third request is that you shall bid Lancelot du Lake make me a knight, for he is the only man in your court from whom I will take that honor. When I am gone let him ride after me, and dub me knight when I require it of him."

"I grant your wish," said the king. "All shall be done as you desire."

"Fie on you all!" cried the damsel. "I came here for a knight, and you offer me a kitchen scullion. Is this King Arthur's way of rescuing a lady in distress? If so, I want none of it, and will seek my knight elsewhere."

She left the court, red with anger, mounted her horse, and rode away.

She had hardly gone when a page of the court came to Beaumains and told him that his dwarf

was without, with a noble horse and a rich suit of armor, and all other necessaries of the best.

At this all the court marvelled, for they could not imagine who had sent all this rich gear to a kitchen menial. But when Beaumains was armed, there were none in the court who presented a more manly aspect than he. He took courteous leave of the king, and of Gawaine and Lancelot, praying the latter that he would soon ride after him. This done, he mounted his horse and pursued the damsel.

But those who observed him noticed that, while he was well horsed and had trappings of cloth of gold, he bore neither shield nor spear. Among those who watched him was Kay, who said,—

"Yonder goes my kitchen drudge, as fine a knight as the best of us, if a brave show were all that a knight needed. I have a mind to ride after him, to let him know that I am still his superior."

"You had better let him alone," said Gawaine. "You may find more than you bargain for."

But Kay armed himself and rode after Beaumains, whom he overtook just as he came up with the damsel.

"Hold there, Beaumains," he cried, in mockery. "Do you not know me?"

"Yes," answered the young man. "I know you for an ungentle knight of the court, who has put much despite upon me. It is my turn to repay you for your insults; so, sirrah, defend yourself."

Kay thereupon put his spear in rest and rode upon Beaumains, who awaited him sword in hand When they came together, Beaumains, with a skilful parry, turned aside the spear, and then with a vigorous thrust wounded Kay in the side, so that he fell from his horse like a dead man. This done, he dismounted and took Kay's shield and spear, and bade his dwarf take his horse.

All this was observed by the damsel, and also by Lancelot, who had followed closely upon the track of the seneschal.

"Now, Sir Lancelot, I am ready to accept your offer to knight me," said Beaumains, "but, first, I would prove myself worthy of the honor, and so will joust with you, if you consent."

"That I shall certainly not decline," said Lancelot, counting upon an easy victory.

But when the knight and the youth rode against each other both were hurled from their horses to the earth, and sorely bruised. But Beaumains was entangled in his harness, and Lancelot helped him from his horse.

Then Beaumains flung aside his shield and proffered to fight Lancelot on foot, to which the latter consented. For an hour they fought, Beaumains showing such strength that Lancelot marvelled at it, and esteemed him more a giant than a knight. He began, indeed, to fear that he might be vanquished in the end, and at length cried out,—

"Beaumains, you fight too hard, considering

that there is no quarrel between us. I fancy you need no further proof."

"That is true enough, my lord," said Beaumains. "But it did me good to feel your might. As for my own strength, I hardly know it yet."

"It is as much as I want to deal with," said Lancelot. "I had to do my best to save my honor."

"Then you think I may prove myself a worthy knight?"

"I warrant you that, if you do as well as you have done to-day."

"I pray you, then, to invest me with the order of knighthood."

"That shall I willingly do. But you must first tell me your name, and that of your father."

"You will keep my secret?"

"I promise you that on my faith, until you are ready to reveal it yourself."

"Then, sir, my name is Gareth, and I am Gawaine's brother, though he knows it not. I was but a child when he became a knight, but King Lot was my father."

"I am very glad to hear that," said Lancelot. "I knew you were of gentle blood, and came to court for something else than meat and drink."

Then Gareth kneeled before Lancelot, who made him a knight, and bade him be a good and worthy one, and to honor his birth by his deeds.

Lancelot then left him and returned to Kay, who lay half dead in the road. He had him

borne back to the court, but his wound proved long in healing, and he found himself the scorn of the court for his discourteous treatment of the youth who had been put in his care.

CHAPTER II.

THE BLACK, THE GREEN, AND THE RED KNIGHTS.

When Beaumains overtook the damsel, he received from her but a sorry greeting.

"How dare you follow me?" she said. "You smell too much of the kitchen for my liking. Your clothes are foul with grease and tallow, and I marvel much that King Arthur made a knight of such a sorry rogue. As for yonder knight whom you wounded, there is no credit in that, for it was done by treachery and cowardice, not by skill and valor. I know well why Kay named you Beaumains, for you are but a lubber and turner of spits, and a washer of soiled dishes."

"Say what you will, damsel," answered Beaumains, "you shall not drive me away. King Arthur chose me to achieve your adventure, and I shall perform it or die."

"Fie on you, kitchen knave! you would not dare, for all the broth you ever supped, to look the red knight in the face."

"Would I not? That is to be seen."

As they thus angrily debated, there came to them a man flying at full speed.

"Help me, sir knight!" he cried. "Six thieves have taken my lord and bound him, and I fear they will slay him if he be not rescued."

"Lead me to him," said Beaumains.

He followed the man to a neighboring glade, where he saw a knight bound and prostrate, surrounded by six sorry-looking villains. At sight of this the heart of Beaumains leaped with anger. With a ringing battle-cry he rushed upon the knaves, and with three vigorous strokes laid three of them dead upon the earth. The others fled, but he followed at full speed, and quickly overtook them. Then they turned and assailed him fiercely, but after a short fight he slew them all. He then rode back to the knight, whom his man had unbound.

The rescued knight thanked him warmly, and begged him to ride with him to his castle, where he would reward him for his great service. But Beaumains answered that he was upon a quest which could not be left, and as for reward he would leave that to God.

Then he turned and rode back to the damsel, who greeted him with the same contempt as before, bidding him ride farther from her, as she could not bear the smell of the kitchen.

"Do you fancy that I esteem you any the nobler for having killed a few churls? You shall

see a sight yet, sir knave, that will make you turn your back, and that quickly."

Not much farther had they ridden when they were overtaken by the rescued knight, who begged them, as it was near night, and his castle close at hand, to spend the night there. The damsel agreed to this, and they rode together to the castle, where they were well entertained.

But at supper the knight set Beaumains before the damsel.

"Fie, fie! sir knight," she exclaimed. "This is discourteous, to seat a kitchen page before a lady of high birth. This fellow is more used to carve swine than to sit at lords' tables."

To this Beaumains made no answer, but the knight was ashamed, and withdrew with his guest to a side table, leaving her to the honor of the high table alone. When morning came they thanked the knight for their entertainment, and rode refreshed away.

Other adventures were ready for Beaumains before they had ridden far, for they soon found themselves at the side of a river that had but a single ford, and on the opposite side stood two knights, ready to dispute the passage with any who should attempt it.

"What say you to this?" asked the damsel. "Will you face yonder knights, or turn back?"

"I shall not turn; nor would I, if there were six more of them. You shall see that I can deal with knights as well as knaves."

Then he rode into the water, in the midst of which he met one of the knights, their spears breaking as they came fiercely together. They then drew their swords and began a fierce fight in the centre of the ford. But at last Beaumains dealt his opponent a blow on the helm that stunned him, and hurled him from his horse into the water, where he was quickly drowned.

Beaumains now spurred forward to the land, where the other knight rushed upon him as he touched shore, breaking his spear, but not shaking the young champion in his seat. Then they went at it with sword and shield, and with the same fortune as before, for Beaumains quickly cleaved the helmet and brain of his opponent, and left him dead on the ground.

He now turned and called proudly to the damsel, bidding her to ride forward, as he had cleared the ford for her passage.

"Alas!" she cried, "that a kitchen page should have the fortune to kill two valiant knights. You fancy you have done a doughty deed, but I deny it. The first knight was drowned through his horse stumbling, and the other one you struck a foul blow from behind. Never brag of this, for I can attest it was not honestly done."

"You may say what you will," rejoined Beaumains. "Whoever seeks to hinder me shall make way or kill me, for nothing less than death shall stop me on my quest to aid your lady."

"You can boast loudly before a woman. Wait

till you meet the knights I take you to, and you will be taught another lesson."

"Fair damsel, if you will but give me courteous language, I shall ask no more. As for the knights you speak of, let come what will come."

"I say this for your own good; for if you continue to follow me you will be slain. What you have done is by misadventure, not by prowess. If you are wise, you will turn back with what little honor you may claim."

"Say what you choose, damsel, but wherever you go there go I, and it will take more than insulting words to turn me back."

So they rode on till evening, she continuing to chide and berate him, and bid him leave her, and he answering meekly, but with no abatement of his resolution.

Finally a strange sight came to them. For before them they saw a black lawn, in whose midst grew a black hawthorn. On one side of this hung a black banner, and on the other a black shield, while near by stood a black spear of great size, and a massive black horse covered with silk. Near by was a knight armed in black armor, who was known as the knight of the black lawn.

The damsel, on seeing this knight, bade Beaumains flee down the valley, telling him that he might still escape, for the knight's horse was not saddled.

"Gramercy," said Beaumains, "will you always

take me for a coward? I fly not from one man, though he be as black as ten ravens."

The black knight, seeing them approach, thus addressed the damsel,—

"So, my lady, you are here again! Have you brought this knight from King Arthur's court to be your champion?"

"Hardly so, fair sir. This is but a kitchen knave, who was fed in Arthur's court through charity, and has followed me as a cur follows his master."

"Why comes he then in knightly guise? And what do you in such foul company?"

"I cannot get rid of him, sir. He rides with me in my despite. I bring him here that you may rid me of the unhappy knave. Through mishap and treachery he killed two knights at the river ford, and did other deeds that might have been of worth were they fairly done. Yet he is but a sorry poltroon."

"I am surprised," said the black knight, "that any man of worth will fight with him."

"They knew him not," she answered, "and fancy him of some credit from his riding with me, and from his brave show of armor."

"That may be," said the black knight. "Yet, knave or not, he looks like a strong fellow. This much I shall do to relieve you of him. I shall put him on foot, and take from him his horse and armor. It would be a shame to do him more harm."

Beaumains had heard all this, biting his lips in anger. He now scornfully replied,—

"Sir knight, you are liberal in disposing of my horse and armor, but beware you do not pay a fair price for them. Whether you like it or not, this lawn I shall pass, and you will get no horse or armor of mine till you win them in open fight. Let me see if you can do it."

"Say you so? You shall yield me this lady, or pay dearly for it; for it does not beseem a kitchen page to ride with a lady of high degree."

"If you want her, you must win her," said Beaumains, "and much comfort may you get from her tongue. As for me, I am a gentleman born, and of higher birth than you; and will prove this on your body if you deny it."

Then in hot anger they rode apart, and came together with a sound of thunder. The spear of the black knight broke, but Beaumains thrust him through the side, the spear breaking in his body, and leaving the truncheon in his flesh. Yet, despite his wound, he drew his sword and struck with strength and fury at his antagonist. But the fight lasted not long, for the black knight, faint with loss of blood, fell from his horse in a swoon, and quickly died.

Then Beaumains, seeing that the horse and armor were better than his own, dismounted and put on the dead knight's armor. Now, mounting the sable horse, he rode after the damsel. On coming up she greeted him as before.

"Away, knave, the smell of thy clothes displeases me. And what a pity it is that such as you should by mishap slay so good a knight! But you will be quickly repaid, unless you fly, for there is a knight hereby who is double your match."

"I may be beaten or slain, fair damsel," said Beaumains; "but you cannot drive me off by foul words, or by talking of knights who will beat or kill me. Somehow I ride on and leave your knights on the ground. You would do well to hold your peace, for I shall follow you, whatever may happen, unless I be truly beaten or slain."

So they rode on, Beaumains in silence, but the damsel still at times reviling, till they saw approaching them a knight who was all in green, both horse and harness. As he came nigh, he asked the damsel,—

"Is that my brother, the black knight, who rides with you?"

"No," she replied. "Your brother is dead. This unhappy kitchen knave has slain him through mishap."

"Alas!" cried the green knight, "has so noble a warrior as he been slain by a knave! Traitor, you shall die for your deed!"

"I defy you," said Beaumains. "I slew him knightly and not shamefully, and am ready to answer to you with sword and spear."

Then the knight took a green horn from his saddle-bow, and blew on it three warlike notes

Immediately two damsels appeared, who aided him in arming. This done, he mounted his steed, took from their hands a green spear and green shield, and stationed himself opposite Beaumains.

Setting spurs to their horses they rode furiously together, both breaking their spears, but keeping their seats. Then they attacked each other, sword in hand, and cut and slashed with knightly vigor. At length, in a sudden wheel, Beaumains's horse struck that of the green knight on the side and overturned it, the knight having to leap quickly to escape being overthrown.

When Beaumains saw this, he also sprang to the earth and met his antagonist on foot. Here they fought for a long time, till both had lost much blood.

"You should be ashamed to stand so long fighting with a kitchen knave," cried the damsel at last to the green knight. "Who made you knight, that you let such a lad match you, as the weed overgrows the corn?"

Her words of scorn so angered the green knight that he struck a wrathful blow at Beaumains, which cut deeply into his shield. Beaumains, roused by this and by the damsel's language, struck back with such might on the helm of his foe as to hurl him to his knees. Then, seizing him, he flung him to the ground, and towered above him with upraised sword.

"I yield me!" cried the knight. "Slay me not, I beg of you"

"You shall die," answered Beaumains, "unless this damsel pray me to spare your life," and he unlaced his helm, as with intent to slay him.

"Pray you to save his life!" cried the damsel, in scorn. "I shall never so demean myself to a page of the kitchen."

"Then he shall die."

"Slay him, if you will. Ask me not to beg for his life."

"Alas!" said the green knight, "you would not let me die when you can save my life with a word? Fair sir, spare me, and I will forgive you my brother's death, and become your man, with thirty knights who are at my command."

"In the fiend's name!" cried the damsel, "shall such a knave have service of thee and thirty knights?"

"All this avails nothing," said Beaumains. "You shall have your life only at this damsel's request," and he made a show as if he would slay him.

"Let him be, knave," said the damsel. "Slay him not, or you shall repent it."

"Damsel," said Beaumains, "your request is to me a command and a pleasure. His life shall be spared, since you ask it. Sir knight of the green array, I release you at the damsel's request, for I am bound by her wish, and will do all that she commands."

Then the green knight kneeled down and did homage with his sword.

"I am sorry, sir knight, for your mishap, and

for your brother's death," said the damsel. "I had great need of your help, for I dread the passage of this forest."

"You need not," he replied. "To-night you shall lodge at my castle, and to-morrow I will aid you to pass the forest."

So they rode to his manor, which was not far distant. Here it happened as it had on the evening before, for the damsel reviled Beaumains, and would not listen to his sitting at the same table with her.

"Why deal you such despite to this noble warrior?" said the green knight. "You are wrong, for he will do you good service, and whatever he declares himself to be, I warrant in the end you will find him to come of right noble blood."

"You say far more of him than he deserves," she replied. "I know him too well."

"And so do I, for he is the best champion I ever found; and I have fought in my day with many worthy knights."

That night, when they went to rest, the green knight set a guard over Beaumains's chamber, for he feared some harm to him from the bitter scorn and hatred of the damsel. In the morning he rode with them through the forest, and at parting said,—

"My lord Beaumains, I and my knights shall always be at your summons, early or late, or whatever be the service you demand."

"That is well said. When I require your ser

vice it will be to yield yourself and your knights to King Arthur."

"If you bid us do so, we shall be ready at all times."

"Fie on you!" said the damsel. "It shames me to see good knights obedient to a kitchen knave."

After they had parted she turned to Beaumains, and said, despitefully,—

"Why wilt thou follow me, lackey of the kitchen? Cast away thy spear and shield and fly while you may, for that is at hand which you will not easily escape. Were you Lancelot himself, or any knight of renown, you would not lightly venture on a pass just in advance of us, called the pass perilous."

"Damsel," said Beaumains, "he who is afraid let him flee. It would be a shame for me to turn back, after having ridden so far with you."

"You soon shall, whether it be to your liking or not," replied the damsel, scornfully.

What the damsel meant quickly appeared, for in a little time they came in sight of a tower which was white as snow in hue, and with every appliance for defence. Over the gateway hung fifty shields of varied colors, and in front spread a level meadow. On this meadow were scaffolds and pavilions, and many knights were there, for there was to be a tournament on the morrow.

The lord of the castle was at a window, and as he looked upon the tournament field he saw ap-

proaching a damsel, a dwarf, and a knight armed at all points.

"A knight-errant, as I live!" said the lord. "By my faith, I shall joust with him, and get myself in train for the tournament."

He hastily armed and rode from the gates. What Beaumains saw was a knight all in red, his horse, harness, shield, spear, and armor alike being of this blood-like color. The red knight was, indeed, brother to those whom Beaumains had lately fought, and on seeing the black array of the youth, he cried,—

"Brother, is it you? What do you in these marshes?"

"No, no, it is not he," said the damsel, "but a kitchen knave who has been brought up on alms in Arthur's court."

"Then how got he that armor?"

"He has slain your brother, the black knight, and taken his horse and arms. He has also overcome your brother, the green knight. I hope you may revenge your brothers on him, for I see no other way of getting rid of him."

"I will try," said the red knight, grimly. "Sir knight, take your place for a joust."

Beaumains, who had not yet spoken, rode to a proper distance, and then the two knights rushed together with such even force that both horses fell to the ground, the riders nimbly leaping from them.

Then with sword and shield they fought like wild boars for the space of two hours, advancing,

retreating, feigning, striking, now here, now there, till both were well weary of the fray. But the damsel, who looked on, now cried loudly to the red knight,—

"Alas, noble sir, will you let a kitchen knave thus endure your might, after all the honor you have won from worthy champions?"

Then the red knight flamed with wrath, and attacked Beaumains with such fury that he wounded him so that the blood flowed in a stream to the ground. Yet the young knight held his own bravely, giving stroke for stroke, and by a final blow hurled his antagonist to the earth. He had raised his sword to slay him, when the red knight craved mercy, saying,—

"Noble sir, you have me at advantage, but I pray you not to slay me. I yield me with the fifty knights at my command. And I forgive you all you have done to my brothers."

"That will not suffice," said Beaumains. "You must die, unless the damsel shall pray me to spare your life." And he raised his sword as if for the fatal blow.

"Let him live, then, Beaumains. He is a noble knight, and it is only by a chance blow that you have overcome him."

"It is enough that you ask it," said Beaumains. "Rise, sir knight, and thank this damsel for your life."

The red knight did so, and then prayed that they would enter his castle and spend the night

there. To this they consented, but as they sat at supper the damsel continued to berate her champion, in such language that their host marvelled at the meekness of the knight.

In the morning the red knight came to Beaumains with his followers, and proffered to him his homage and fealty at all times.

"I thank you," said Beaumains, "but all I ask is, that when I demand it you shall go to Arthur's court, and yield yourself as his knight."

"I and my fellowship will ever be ready at your summons," replied the red knight.

Then Beaumains and the damsel resumed their journey, while she, as if in a fury of spite, berated him more vilely than ever before.

"Fair lady," he said, with all meekness, "you are discourteous to revile me as you do. What would you have of me? The knights that you have threatened me with are all dead or my vassels. When you see me beaten, then you may bid me go in shame and I will obey, but till then I will not leave you. I were worse than a fool to be driven off by insulting words when I am daily winning honor."

"You shall soon meet a knight who will test your boasted strength. So far you have fought with boys. Now you have a man who would try Arthur's self."

"Let him come," said Beaumains. "The better a man he is, the more honor shall I gain from a joust with him."

CHAPTER III.

THE RED KNIGHT OF THE RED LAWNS.

BEAUMAINS rode forward with the damsel till it was close upon the hour of noon, when he saw that they were approaching a rich and fair city, well walled, and with many noble buildings.

Between them and the city extended a new-mown meadow, a mile and a half in width, on which were placed many handsome pavilions.

"These pavilions belong to the lord who owns that city," said the damsel. "It is his custom, during fair weather, to joust and tourney in this meadow. He has around him five hundred knights and gentlemen of arms, and they have knightly games of all sorts."

"I shall be glad to see that worthy lord," said Beaumains.

"That you shall, and very soon."

She rode on till she came in sight of the lord's pavilion.

"Look yonder," she said. "That rich pavilion, of the color of India, is his. All about him, men and women, and horse-trappings, shields, and spears, are of the same rare color. His name is Sir Persant of India, and you will find him the lordliest knight you ever saw."

'Be he never so stout a knight," answered

Beaumains, "I shall abide in this field till I see him behind his shield."

"That is a fool's talk," she replied. "If you were a wise man, you would fly."

"Why should I?" rejoined Beaumains. "If he be as noble a knight as you say, he will meet me alone; not with all his men. And if there come but one at a time I shall not fail to face them while life lasts."

"That is a proud boast for a greasy kitchen lout," she answered.

"Let him come and do his worst," said Beaumains. "I would rather fight him five times over than endure your insults. You are greatly to blame to treat me so vilely."

"Sir," she replied, with a sudden change of tone, "I marvel greatly who you are, and of what kindred you come. This I will admit, that you have performed as boldly as you have promised. But you and your horse have had great labor, and I fear we have been too long on the road. The place we seek is but seven miles away, and we have passed all points of peril except this. I dread, therefore, that you may receive some hurt from this strong knight that will unfit you for the task before you. For Persant, strong as he is, is no match for the knight who besieges my lady, and I would have you save your strength for the work you have undertaken."

"Be that as it may," said Beaumains, "I have come so near the knight that I cannot withdraw

without shame. I hope, with God's aid, to become his master within two hours, and then we can reach your lady's castle before the day ends."

"Much I marvel," cried the damsel, "what manner of man you are. You must be of noble blood, for no woman ever before treated a knight so shamefully as I have you, and you have ever borne it courteously and meekly. Such patience could never come but from gentle blood."

"A knight who cannot bear a woman's words had better doff his armor," answered Beaumains. "Do not think that I heeded not your words. But the anger they gave me was the worse for my adversaries, and you only aided to make me prove myself a man of worth and honor. If I had meat in Arthur's kitchen, what odds? I could have had enough of it in many a place. I did it but to prove who were worthy to be my friends, and that I will in time make known. Whether I be a gentleman born or not, I have done you a gentleman's service, and may do better before we part."

"That you have, fair Beaumains," she said. "I ask your forgiveness for all I have said or done."

"I forgive you with all my heart," he replied. "It pleases me so to be with you that I have found joy even in your evil words. And now that you are pleased to speak courteously to me, it seems to me that I am stout at heart enough to meet any knight living."

As to the battle that followed between Beaumains and Persant, it began and ended much like

those that we have related, Persant in the end being overcome, and gaining his life at the lady's request. He yielded himself and a hundred knights to be at Beaumains's command, and invited the travellers to his pavilion, where they were feasted nobly.

In the morning Beaumains and the damsel, after breakfasting, prepared to continue their journey.

"Whither do you lead this knight?" asked Persant of the damsel.

"Sir knight," she replied, "he is going to the aid of my sister, who is besieged in the Castle Dangerous."

"Ah!" cried Persant, "then he will have to do with the Knight of the Red Lawns, a man without mercy, and with the strength of seven men. I fear you take too perilous a task, fair sir. This villain has done great wrong to the lady of the castle, Dame Lioness. I think, fair damsel, you are her sister, Linet?"

"That is my name," replied the damsel.

"This I may say," rejoined Persant: "the Knight of the Red Lawns would have had the castle long ago, but it is his purpose to draw to the rescue Lancelot, Gawaine, Tristram, or Lamorak, whom he is eager to match his might against."

"My Lord Persant of India," said Linet, "will you not make this gentleman a knight before he meets this dread warrior?"

"With all my heart," answered Persant.

"I thank you for your good will," said Beaumains, "but I have been already knighted, and that by the hand of Sir Lancelot."

"You could have had the honor from no more renowned knight," answered Persant. "He, Tristram, and Lamorak now bear the meed of highest renown, and if you fairly match the red knight you may claim to make a fourth in the world's best champions."

"I shall ever do my best," answered Beaumains. "This I may tell you: I am of noble birth. If you and the damsel will keep my secret I will tell it you."

"We shall not breathe it except with your permission," they replied.

"Then I will acknowledge that my name is Gareth of Orkney, that King Lot was my father, and that I am a nephew of King Arthur, and brother to Gawaine, Gaheris, and Agravaine. Yet none of these know who I am, for they left my father's castle while I was but a child."

While they were thus taking leave, Beaumains's dwarf had ridden ahead to the besieged castle, where he saw the Lady Lioness, and told her of the champion her sister was bringing, and what deeds he had done.

"I am glad enough of these tidings," said the lady. "There is a hermitage of mine near by, where I would have you go, and take thither two silver flagons of wine, of two gallons each; also

bread, baked venison, and fowls. I give you also a rich cup of gold for the knight's use. Then go to my sister, and bid her present my thanks to the knight, and pray him to eat and drink, that he may be strong for the great task he undertakes. Tell him I thank him for his courtesy and goodness, and that he whom he is to meet has none of these qualities, but strong and bold as he is, cares for nothing but murder."

This message the dwarf brought back, and led the knight and damsel to the hermitage, where they rested and feasted on the rich food provided. They spent the night there, and in the morning heard mass and broke their fast. Then they mounted and rode towards the besieged castle.

Their journey soon brought them to a plain, where they saw many tents and pavilions, and a castle in the distance. And there was a great noise and much smoke, as from a large encampment. As they came nearer the castle Beaumains saw before him a number of great trees, and from these hung by the neck armed knights, with their shields and swords, and gilt spurs on their heels. Of these there were in all nearly forty.

"What means this sorrowful sight?" asked Beaumains, with a look of deep concern.

"Do not be depressed by what you see," said Linet. "You must keep in spirit, or it will be the worse for you and us all. These knights came here to the rescue of my sister, and the red knight, when he had overcome them, put them to

this shameful death, without mercy or pity. He will serve you in the same way if he should vanquish you."

"Jesu defend me from such a shameful death and disgrace!" cried Beaumains. "If I must die, I hope to be slain in open battle."

"It would be better, indeed. But trust not to his courtesy, for thus he treats all."

"It is a marvel that so vile a murderer has been left to live so long. I shall do my best to end his career of crime."

Then they rode to the castle, and found it surrounded with high and strong walls, with double ditches, and lofty towers within. Near the walls were lodged many lords of the besieging army, and there was great sound of minstrelsy and merry-making. On the opposite side of the castle was the sea, and here vessels rode the waves and the cries of mariners were heard.

Near where they stood was a lofty sycamore-tree, and on its trunk hung a mighty horn, made from an elephant's tusk. This the Knight of the Red Lawns had hung there, in order that any errant knight, who wished to battle for the castle, might summons him to the fray.

"But let me warn you," said Linet, "not to blow it till noon. For it is now early day, and men say that his strength increases till the noontide hour. To blow it now would double your peril."

"Do not advise me thus, fair damsel," said

Beaumains. "I shall meet him at his highest might, and win worshipfully or die knightly in the field. It must be man to man and might to might."

Therewith he spurred his horse to the sycamore, and, taking the horn in hand, blew with it such a blast that castle and camp rang with the sound.

At the mighty blast knights leaped from their tents and pavilions, and those in the castle looked from walls and windows, to see what manner of man was this that blew so lustily. But the Red Knight of the Red Lawns armed in all haste, for he had already been told by the dwarf of the approach of this champion. He was all blood-red in hue, armor, shield, and spurs. An earl buckled on his helm, and they then brought him a red steed and a red spear, and he rode into a little vale near the castle, so that all within and without the castle might behold the battle.

"Look you be light and glad," said Linet to the knight, "for yonder is your deadly enemy, and at yonder window is my sister, Dame Lioness."

"Where?" asked Beaumains.

"Yonder," she said, pointing.

"I see her," said Beaumains. "And from here she seems the fairest lady I ever looked upon. I ask no better quarrel than to fight for her, and wish no better fate than to greet her as my lady," and his face grew glad as he looked up to the window.

As he did so the Lady Lioness made a grateful

courtesy to him, bending to the earth and holding up her hands. This courtesy was returned by Beaumains; but now the Knight of the Red Lawns rode forward.

"Leave your looking, sir knight," he said. "Or look this way, for I warn you that she is my lady, and I have done many battles for her."

"You waste your time, then, it seems to me, for she wants none of your love. And to waste love on those who want it not is but folly. If I thought she would not thank me for it, I would think twice before doing battle for her. But she plainly wants not you, and I will tell you this: I love her, and will rescue her or die."

"Say you so? The knights who hang yonder might give you warning."

"You shame yourself and knighthood by such an evil custom," said Beaumains, hotly. "How can any lady love such a man as you? That shameful sight gives me more courage than fear, for I am nerved now to revenge those knights as well as to rescue yonder lady."

"Make ready," cried the red knight; "we have talked enough."

Then Beaumains bade the damsel retire to a safe distance. Taking their places, they put their spears in rest, and came together like two thunderbolts, each smiting the other so fiercely that the breast-plates, horse-girths, and cruppers burst, and both fell to the earth with the bridle-reins still in their hands, and they lay awhile stunned by the fall.

So long they lay indeed that all who looked on thought that both their necks were broken, and said that the stranger knight must be of mighty prowess, for never had the red knight been so roughly handled before.

But ere long the knights regained their breath and sprang to their feet. Then, drawing their swords, they ran like fierce lions together, giving each other such buffets on the helms that both reeled backwards, while pieces were hewed out from their armor and shields and fell into the field.

Thus they fought on till it was past noon, when both stopped for breath, and stood panting and bleeding till many who beheld them wept for pity. When they had rested awhile they again went to battle, now gnashing at each other with their swords like tusked boars, and now running together like furious rams, so that at times both fell to the ground; and at times they were grappled so closely that they changed swords in the wrestle.

This went on till evening was near at hand, and so evenly they continued matched that none could know which would win. Their armor was so hewn away that the naked flesh showed in places, and these places they did their utmost to defend. The red knight was a wily fighter, and Beaumains suffered sorely before he learned his methods and met him in his own way.

At length, by mutual assent, they granted each other a short time for rest, and seated themselves

upon two hillocks, where each had his page to unlace his helm and give him a breath of the cold air.

While Beaumains's helm was off he looked at the castle window, and there saw the Lady Lioness, who looked at him in such wise that his heart grew light with joy, and he bade the red knight to make ready, for the battle must begin again.

Then they laced their helms and stepped together and fought freshly. But Beaumains came near to disaster, for the red knight, by a skilful sword sweep, struck his sword from his hand, and then gave him such a buffet on the helm as hurled him to the earth.

The red knight ran forward to his fallen foe, but Linet cried loudly,—

"Oh, Beaumains, where is thy valor gone? Alas, my sister sobs and weeps to see you overthrown, till my own heart is heavy for her grief."

Hearing this, Beaumains sprang to his feet before his foe could reach him, and with a leap recovered his sword, which he gripped with a strong hand. And thus he faced again his surprised antagonist.

Then the young knight, nerved by love and desperation, poured such fierce blows on his enemy that he smote the sword from his hand and brought him to the earth with a fiery blow on the helm.

Before the red knight could rise, Beaumains threw himself upon him, and tore his helm from

his head with intent to slay him. But the fallen knight cried loudly,—

"O noble knight, I yield me to thy mercy."

"Why should you have it, after the shameful death you have given to so many knights?"

"I did all this through love," answered the red knight. "I loved a lady whose brother was slain by Lancelot or Gawaine, as she said. She made me swear on my knighthood to fight till I met one of them, and put to a shameful death all I overcame. And I vowed to fight King Arthur's knights above all, till I should meet him that had slain her brother."

Then there came up many earls, and barons, and noble knights, who fell upon their knees and prayed for mercy to the vanquished, saying,—

"Sir, it were fairer to take homage and fealty of him, and let him hold his lands of you, than to slay him. Nothing wrong that he has done will be undone by his death, and we will all become your men, and do you homage and fealty."

"Fair lords," said Beaumains, "I am loath to slay this knight, though his deeds have been ill and shameful. But as he acted through a lady's request I blame him the less, and will release him on these conditions: He must go into the castle and yield to the Lady Lioness, and make amends to her for his trespass on her lands; then if she forgives him I will. Afterwards he must go to the court of King Arthur and obtain forgiveness

from Lancelot and Gawaine for the ill will he has borne them."

"All this I will do," said the red knight, "and give you pledges and sureties therefor."

Then Beaumains granted him his life, and permitted him to rise. Afterwards the damsel Linet disarmed Beaumains and applied healing unguents to his wounds, and performed the same service for the red knight. For ten days thereafter Beaumains dwelt with the red knight, who showed him all the honor possible, and who afterwards went into the castle and submitted himself to the Lady Lioness, according to the terms of his compact.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW BEAUMAINS WON HIS BRIDE.

After the ten days of feasting and pleasure that followed the events we have just related, the Red Knight of the Red Lawns set out with his noblest followers to Arthur's court, to make submission as he had covenanted. When he had gone, Beaumains armed himself, took his horse and spear, and rode to the castle of the Lady Lioness. But when he came to the gate he found there many armed men, who pulled up the drawbridge and let fall the portcullis.

Marvelling deeply that he was denied admit-

tance, Beaumains looked up at the window, where he saw the lady of the castle, who called out to him,—

"Go thy way, Sir Beaumains. You shall not yet have my love till you have earned for yourself a name of world-wide honor. I bid you, therefore, go strive for fame and glory this twelvemonth, and when you return you shall hear new tidings."

"Alas, fair lady," said Beaumains, "is this all I have deserved of you? I thought I had bought your love at the price of some of the best blood in my body."

"Fair, courteous knight, be not so hasty," answered Lioness. "Your labor and your love shall not be lost. A twelvemonth will soon pass away; and trust me that I shall be true to you, and to my death shall love no other than you."

With this she turned from the window, and Beaumains rode slowly away from the castle in deep sorrow, and heeding not whither he went till deep night came upon him. The next day he rode in the same heedless fashion, and at night couched in a wayside lodge, bidding the dwarf guard his horse and watch all night.

But near day dawn came a knight in black armor, who, seeing that Beaumains slept soundly, crept slyly behind the dwarf, caught him up under his arm, and rode away with him at full speed. But as he rode, the dwarf called loudly to his master for help, waking the sleeping knight, who

sprang to his feet and saw the robber and the dwarf vanishing into the distance.

Then Beaumains armed himself in a fury, and rode straight forward through marshes and dales, so hot upon the chase that he heeded not the road, and was more than once flung by his stumbling horse into the mire. At length he met a countryman, whom he asked for information.

"Sir knight," he answered, "I have seen the rider with the dwarf. But I advise you to follow him no farther. His name is Sir Gringamore; he dwells but two miles from here, and he is one of the most valiant knights of the country round."

With little dread from this warning, Beaumains rode on, with double fury as he came near the robber's castle. Soon he thundered through the gates, which stood wide open, and sword in hand cried, in a voice that rang through the castle,—

"Thou traitor, Sir Gringamore, yield me my dwarf again, or by the faith that I owe to the order of knighthood I will make you repent bitterly your false deed."

Meanwhile, within the castle matters of interest were occurring. For Gringamore was brother to the Lady Lioness, and had stolen the dwarf at her request, that she might learn from him who Beaumains really was. The dwarf, under threat of imprisonment for life, thus answered,—

"I fear to tell his name and kindred. Yet if I must, I will say that he is a king's son, that his mother is sister to King Arthur, and that his

name is Sir Gareth of Orkney. Now, I pray you, let me go to him again, for he will have me in spite of you, and if he be angry, he will work you much rack and ruin."

"As for that," said Gringamore, "it can wait. Let us go to dinner."

"He may well be a king's son," said Linet to her sister, "for he is the most courteous and long-suffering man I ever met. I tried him with such reviling as never lady uttered before, but he bore it all with meek and gentle answers. Yet to armed knights he was like a lion."

As they thus talked, the challenge of Beaumains rang loud from the castle court. Then Gringamore called loudly to him from a window,—

"Cease your boasting, Gareth of Orkney, you will not get your dwarf again."

"Thou coward knight," cried Beaumains. "Bring him here, and do battle with me. Then if you can win him, keep him."

"So I will when I am ready. But you will not get him by loud words."

"Do not anger him, brother," said Lioness. "I have all I want from the dwarf, and he may have him again. But do not let him know who I am. Let him think me a strange lady."

"Very well," said Gringamore; "if that is your wish, he can have the dwarf." Then he went down to the court and said,—

"Sir, I beg your pardon, and am ready to amend all the harm I have done you. Pray

alight, and take such cheer as my poor castle affords."

"Shall I have my dwarf?" said Gareth.

"Yes. Since he told me who you are, and of your noble deeds, I am ready to return him."

Then Gareth dismounted, and the dwarf came and took his horse.

"Oh, my little fellow," said Gareth, "I have had many adventures for your sake."

Gringamore then led him into the hall and presented him to his wife. And while they stood there conversing Dame Lioness came forth dressed like a princess, and was presented to the knight.

When Gareth saw her his feeling for the Lady Lioness weakened in his heart, and it grew ready to vanish as the day passed, and he conversed much with this strange and lovely lady. There were all manner of games, and sports of dancing and singing, and the more he beheld her the more he loved her, while through his heart ran ever the thought: "Would that the lady of the Castle Dangerous were half so lovely and charming as this beautiful stranger."

When supper came, Gareth could not eat, and hardly knew where he was, so hot had his love grown. All this was noted by Gringamore, who after supper took his sister aside and said,—

"I can well see how matters stand between you and this noble knight. And it seems to me you cannot do better than to bestow your hand upon him."

"I should like to try him further," she replied, "though he has done me noble service, and my heart is warmly turned to him."

Gringamore then went to Gareth and said,—

"Sir, I welcome you gladly to my house, for I can see that you dearly love my sister, and that she loves you as well. With my will she is yours if you wish her."

"If she will accept me," answered Gareth, "there will be no happier man on earth."

"Trust me for that," said Gringamore.

"I fancied I loved the Lady Lioness," said Gareth, "and promised for her sake to return to this country in a twelvemonth. But since I have seen your sister I fear my love for her is gone."

"It was too sudden to be deep," said Gringamore. "She will be consoled, doubt not. Now let me take you to my sister."

Then he led Gareth to his sister and left them together, where they told each other their love, and Gareth kissed her many times, and their hearts were filled with joy.

"But how is it with the Lady Lioness, to whom you vowed your love?" she asked.

"Promised; not vowed," he answered. "And she was not ready to accept it, but gave me a twelvemonth's probation. Moreover, I saw but her face at a window, and that was little to base love upon."

"Did she look like me?"

"Somewhat, but not half so lovely."

"Do you think you could have loved her so well?"

"No, indeed; for I will vow by sword and spear that there is no woman in the world so charming as you."

"I fear that the Lady Lioness loves you, and that her heart will be broken."

"How could she? She saw so little of me."

"I know she loves you; she has told me so. I bid you to forget me and make her happy."

"That I can never do. You do not love me, or you could not say this."

"You are my heart's desire. But I feel deeply for the Lady Lioness, whose love I know. If you cannot love her alone, you may love us both together. I grant you this privilege."

"I will not accept it," said Gareth, looking strangely at her smiling countenance. "I love but you; my heart can hold no more."

"You blind fellow," she answered, with a merry laugh, "you looked not at the Lady Lioness closely, or you would not so easily forget your troth plight. Know, sirrah, that I am the lady of the Castle Dangerous, that my name is Lioness, and that I am she whom you have so lightly thrown aside for the love of a strange lady."

Then Gareth looked into her glowing countenance, and saw there that she spoke the truth and that he had been pleasantly beguiled. With a warm impulse of love he caught her in his arms and kissed her rosy lips, exclaiming,—

"I withdraw it all. I love you both; the lady of the Castle Dangerous a little; but the lady of the Castle Amorous as my heart's mistress, to dwell there while life remains."

Then they conversed long and joyfully, and she told him why she had made her brother steal the dwarf, and why she had deceived him, so as to win his love for herself alone. And they plighted their troth, and vowed that their love for each other should never cease.

Other strange things happened to Gareth in that castle, through the spells of the damsel Linet, who knew something of sorcery. But these we shall not tell, but return to King Arthur's court, in which at the next feast of Pentecost a high festival was held at Carlion.

Hither, during the feast, came all those whom Gareth had overcome, and yielded themselves, saying that they had been sent thither by a knight named Beaumains. But most of all was Arthur surprised by the deeds of his kitchen boy when the Red Knight of the Red Lawns rode up with six hundred followers, and yielded himself as vassal to Beaumains and to the king. Arthur then, charging him strictly that he should do no more deeds of murder, gave to Sir Ironside, which was the knight's name, the greatest honors of his court, and also to the green and the red knights, and to Sir Persant of Inde, who were all present with their followers.

But while the court was at feast there came in

the queen of Orkney, with a great following of knights and ladies, seeking her young son Gareth. She was lovingly saluted by her sons Gawaine, Gaheris, and Agravaine, who for fifteen years had not seen her, but she loudly demanded Gareth of her brother King Arthur.

"He was here among you a twelvemonth, and you made a kitchen knave of him, which I hold to be a shame to you all. What have you done to the dear son who was my joy and bliss?"

These words filled all hearts with a strange sensation, and most of all that of Gawaine, who thought it marvellous that he should have made so much of his brother and not known him. Then Arthur told his sister of all that had happened, and cheered her heart with a recital of her son's great deeds, and promised to have the whole realm searched till he should be found.

"You shall not need," said Lancelot. "My advice is that you send a messenger to Dame Lioness, and request her to come in all haste to court. Let her give you counsel where to find him. I doubt not she knows where he is."

This counsel seemed judicious to the king, and he sent the messenger as requested, who came in due time to the Castle Dangerous, and delivered his letters to Lioness.

She brought these to her brother and Gareth, and asked what she should do.

"My lady and love," said Gareth, "if you go to Arthur's court I beg that you will not let them

know where I am. But give this advice to the king, that he call a great tournament, to be held at your castle at the feast of the Assumption, and announce that whatever knight proves himself best shall wed you and win your lands. Be sure that I will be there to do my best in your service."

This advice pleased the lady, whose warm faith in the prowess of her lover told her that he would win in the tournament. She therefore set out with a noble escort and rode to King Arthur's court, where she was received with the highest honors. The king closely questioned her about Sir Gareth, desiring particularly to know what had become of him. She answered that where he was she was not at liberty to tell, and said further to the king,—

"Sir, there is a way to find him. It is my purpose to call a tournament, which shall be held before my castle at the feast of the Assumption. You, my lord Arthur, must be there with your knights, and my knights shall be against you. I doubt me not that then you shall hear of Sir Gareth."

"That is well advised," said the king.

"It shall be announced," she continued, "that the knight who proves the best shall wed me and be lord of my lands. If he be already wedded, his wife shall have a coronal of gold, set with precious stones to the value of a thousand pounds, and a white jerfalcon."

"It is well," said the king. "That will bring Sir Gareth, if he be alive and able to come. If he would win you, he must do his duty nobly."

Soon after the Lady Lioness departed and returned to her castle, where she told all that had passed, and began preparations for the tournament, which was to be held two months from that day.

Gareth sent for Sir Persant of Inde, and for Sir Ironside, the Ked Knight of the Red Lawns, bidding them be ready with all their followers, to fight on his side against King Arthur and his knights. And the cry for the tournament was made in England, Wales and Scotland, Ireland, and Cornwall, and in all the out islands, and in Brittany and other countries. Many good knights came from afar, eager to win honor in the lists, the most of whom held with the party of the castle against King Arthur and his knights.

In due time King Arthur and his following appeared at the Castle Dangerous, there being with him Gawaine and the other brothers of Gareth, Lancelot with his nephews and cousins, and all the most valiant Knights of the Round Table, with various kings who owed him knightly service, as noble a band of warriors as had ever been seen in the land.

Meanwhile Dame Lioness had hospitably entertained the knights of her party, providing ample lodging and food, though abundance was left to be had for gold and silver by King Arthur and his knights.

But Gareth begged her and all who knew him in no manner to make known his name, but to deal with him as if he were the least of their company, as he wished to fight in secret and bide his own time to declare himself.

"Sir," said Dame Lioness to him, "if such be your desire, I will lend you a ring, whose virtue is such that it will turn that which is green to red, and that which is red to green; and also turn blue to white, and white to blue, and so with all colors. And he who wears it will lose no blood, however desperately he fights. For the great love I bear you I lend you this ring; but as you love me heartily in return, let me have it again when the tournament is done, for this ring increases my beauty much more than it is of itself."

"My own dear lady," cried Gareth, "now indeed you prove your love for me. Gladly shall I wear that ring, for I much desire not to be known."

Then Sir Gringamore gave Gareth a powerful bay courser, and a suit of the best of armor; and with them a noble sword which his father had long before won from a heathen tyrant. And so the lover made ready for the tournament, of which his lady-love was to be the prize.

Two days before the Assumption of our Lady, King Arthur reached the castle, and for those two days rich feasting was held, while royal minstrelsy and merry-making of all kinds filled every soul with joy. But when came the morning of the Assumption all was restless bustle and warlike

confusion. At an early hour the heralds were commanded to blow to the field, and soon from every side a throng of knights was to be seen riding gayly to the lists, while a goodly host of spectators made haste to take their seats, all eager to behold that noble passage-at-arms.

Valorous and worthy were the deeds that followed, for hosts of the best knights in the world had gathered in the lists, and there was wondrous breaking of spears and unhorsing of knights, while many who boasted of their firm seat in the saddle went headlong to the earth.

At length there rode into the lists Sir Gareth and Sir Ironside from the castle, each of whom smote to the ground the first knights that encountered them, and before long time had passed Gareth had with one spear unhorsed seven knights of renown.

When King Agwisance of Ireland saw this newcomer fare so nobly, he marvelled much who he might be, for at one time he seemed green and at another blue, his color appearing to change at every course as he rode to and fro, so that no eye could readily follow him.

"I must try this strange turn-color knight myself," said Sir Agwisance, and he spurred his horse vigorously on Gareth.

But with a mighty stroke of his spear Gareth thrust him from his horse, saddle and all. Then King Carados of Scotland rode against him, and was hurled to the earth, horse and man. King

Uriens of Gore, King Bagdemagus, and others who tried their fortune, were served in the same manner. Then Sir Galahalt, the high prince, cried loudly,—

"Knight of the many colors, well hast thou jousted; now make ready, that I may joust with thee."

Gareth heard him, and got a great spear, and quickly the two knights encountered, the prince breaking his spear. But Gareth smote him on the left side of the helm so that he reeled in his saddle, and would have fallen had not his men supported him.

"Truly," said King Arthur, "that knight with the many colors is a lusty fighter. Lancelot, do you try his mettle, before he beats all our best men."

"Sir," said Lancelot, "I should hold it unjust to meet him fresh after his hard labors. It is not the part of a good knight to rob one of the honor for which he has worked so nobly. It may be that he is best beloved of the lady of all that are here, for I can see that he enforces himself to do great deeds. Therefore, for me, he shall have what honor he has won; though it lay in my power to put him from it, I would not."

And now, in the lists, the breaking of spears was followed by drawing of swords; and then there began a sore tournament. There did Sir Lamorak marvellous deeds of arms, and betwixt him and Sir Ironside there was a strong battle,

and one also between Palamides and Bleoberis. Then came in Lancelot, who rode against Sir Turquine and his brother Carados, fighting them both together.

Seeing Lancelot thus hard pressed, Gareth pushed his horse between him and his opponents, and hurtled them asunder, but no stroke would he smite Sir Lancelot, but rode briskly on, striking to right and left, so that his path was marked by the knights he overturned.

Afterward Gareth rode out of the press of knights to adjust his helm, which had become loosened. Here his dwarf came briskly up with drink, and said to him,—

"Let me hold your ring, that you lose it not while you drink."

Gareth gave it to him, and quaffed deeply of the refreshing draught, for he was burning with thirst. This done, his eagerness to return to the fray was so great that he forgot the ring, which he left in the keeping of the dwarf, while he replaced his helm, mounted his horse, and rode briskly back to the lists.

When he reached the field again he was in yellow armor, and there he rashed off helms and pulled down knights till King Arthur marvelled more than ever what knight this was, for though his color changed no more, the king saw by his hair that he was the same knight.

"Go and ride about that yellow knight," said the king to several heralds, "and see if you can

learn who he is. I have asked many knights of his party to-day, and none of them know him."

So a herald rode as near Gareth as he could, and there he saw written about his helm in letters of gold, "This helm is Sir Gareth's of Orkney."

Then the herald cried out as if he were mad, and many others echoed his words, "The knight in the yellow arms is Sir Gareth of Orkney, King Lot's son!"

When Gareth saw that he was discovered he doubled his strokes in his anger, and smote down Sir Sagramore, and his brother Gawaine.

"Oh, brother!" cried Gawaine, "I did not deem that you would strike me. Can you not find food enough for your sword, without coming so near home?"

On hearing this, Gareth was troubled in soul, and with great force made his way out of the press, meeting his dwarf outside.

"Faithless boy!" he cried; "you have beguiled me foully to-day by keeping my ring. Give it to me again; I am too well known without it."

He took the ring, and at once he changed color again, so that all lost sight of him but Gawaine, who had kept his eyes fixed upon him. Leaving the lists, Gareth now rode into the forest, followed at a distance by his brother, who soon lost sight of him in the woodland depths.

When Gareth saw that he had thus distanced his pursuer, he turned to the dwarf and asked his counsel as to what should now be done.

"Sir," said the dwarf, "it seems best to me, now that you are free from danger of spying, that you send my lady, Dame Lioness, her ring. It is too precious a thing to keep from her."

"That is well advised," said Gareth. "Take it to her, and say that I recommend myself to her good grace, and will come when I may; and pray her to be true and faithful to me, as I will be to her."

"It shall be done as you command," said the dwarf, and, receiving the ring, he rode on his errand.

The Lady Lioness received him graciously, and listened with beaming eyes to Gareth's message.

"Where is my knight?" she asked.

"He bade me say that he would not be long from you," answered the dwarf.

Then, bearing a tender reply from the lady, the dwarf sought his master again, and found him impatiently waiting, for he was weary and needed repose.

As they rode forward through the forest a storm of thunder and lightning came up suddenly, and it rained as if heaven and earth were coming together. On through this conflict of the elements rode the weary knight and the disconsolate dwarf, under the drenching leaves of the forest, until night was near at hand. And still it thundered and lightened as if all the spirits of the air had gone mad.

At last, through an opening in the trees, Gareth

to his delight beheld the towers of a castle, and heard the watchman's call upon its walls.

"Good luck follows bad, my worthy dwarf," he cried. "Here is shelter; let us to it."

He rode to the barbican of the castle and called to the porter, praying him in courteous language to let him in from the storm.

"Go thy way," cried the porter, surlily; "thou gettest no lodging here."

"Say not so, fair sir. I am a knight of King Arthur's, and pray the lord or lady of this castle to give me harbor for love of the king."

Then the porter went to the duchess, and told her that a knight of King Arthur's sought shelter.

"I will see him," said the duchess; "for King Arthur's sake he shall not go harborless."

Then she went up into a tower over the gate, with great torch-light, that she might behold the storm-stayed wayfarer. When Gareth saw the light, he cried loudly,—

"Whether thou be lord or lady, giant or champion, I pray for harbor this night. If it be that I must fight for my lodging, spare me that till morning, when I have rested, for I and my horse are both weary."

"Sir knight," said the lady, "you speak like a bold knight errant. This you must know, that the lord of this castle loves not King Arthur nor any of his court. Therefore, it were better for you not to enter here. If you come in it must be under this contract, that wherever you meet my

lord, by road, by lane, or by street, you shall yield to him as his prisoner."

"Madam," asked Gareth, "what is your lord's name?"

"He is the Duke de la Rowse," she answered.

"Well, madam, it shall be as you say. I promise that wherever I meet your lord I shall yield me to his good grace, with the covenant that he will do me no harm. If I understand that he will, then shall I release myself as best I can with sword and spear."

"You speak well and wisely," answered the duchess, and she ordered that the drawbridge be lowered.

Gareth rode into the court-yard, where he alighted and gave his horse to a stableman. Then he was led to the hall, where his dwarf removed his armor.

"Madam," he said, "I shall not leave this hall to-night. When it comes daylight if any one wants to fight me he will find me ready."

Supper was now prepared, the table being garnished with many goodly dishes, and the duchess and other fair ladies sat by while Gareth ate, some of them saying that they never saw a man of nobler carriage or aspect. Shortly after he had supped, his bed was made in the hall, and there he rested all night.

In the morning he heard mass and took his leave of the duchess and her lady attendants, thanking her warmly for his lodging and the good

cheer she had set before him. She now asked him his name.

"Madam," he replied, "my name is Gareth of Orkney, though some men call me Beaumains."

Hearing this, she bade him adieu with great courtesy, for she now knew that she had entertained the knight who had rescued Dame Lioness, and the victor at the tournament.

As for Gareth, he rode onward mile after mile, till he found himself on a mountain side, where he was confronted by a knight named Sir Bendelaine, who demanded that he should joust or yield himself prisoner. Gareth, angry at this demand, rode against the freebooter and smote him so furiously that his spear pierced his body, so that he died on reaching his castle.

Quickly a throng of his knights and servants, furious at their lord's death, rode after the victor and assailed him fiercely. When they saw how well he defended himself, they attacked his horse and killed it with spear-thrusts, and then rushed in a body on the dismounted knight. But they found him still more than their match, for one after another of them fell beneath his sword till only four were left. These fled in terror to the castle, and Gareth, taking the best of their horses, rode leisurely on his way.

Many miles farther had he gone when he found himself near a roadside castle, from whose walls there came to his ears dismal lamentations in

ladies' voices. While he stood wondering at this there came by a page.

"What noise is that within the castle?" asked Gareth.

"Sir knight," answered the page, "within this castle there are thirty ladies, all widows, for their husbands have been slain by the lord of the castle, who is called the brown knight without pity, and there is no more perilous knight now living. Therefore," continued the page, "I bid you flee."

"You may be afraid of him," said Gareth; "but I shall not flee for that."

Then the page saw the brown knight coming.

"Lo! yonder he cometh," he said.

"Let me deal with him," said Gareth.

When the brown knight saw a champion in the road, with spear in rest, awaiting him, he prepared quickly for the combat, and spurring his strong war-horse, rode furiously upon Gareth, breaking his spear in the middle of his shield. But Gareth struck him a fatal blow in return, for his spear went through his body, so that he fell to the ground stark dead.

Then the victor rode into the castle, and prayed the ladies that he might find repose there for the night.

"Alas!" they cried, "that cannot be."

"Give him your best cheer," said the page, "for this knight has killed your enemy."

Hearing this, they joyfully did their utmost to make him comfortable. In the morning, when he

was ready to depart, he went to mass, and there saw the thirty ladies kneeling, and some of them grovelling upon the tombs, with the greatest sorrow and lamentation.

"Fair ladies, you have my pity," he said. "Grieve no more, I pray you; your enemy is justly punished for his crimes."

So with few words he departed, and rode onward till fortune brought him into another mountain. Not far up its slope had he gone when he saw before him a sturdy knight, who bade him stand and joust.

"Who are you?" asked Gareth.

"I am the Duke de la Rowse."

"Then I lodged lately in your castle, and promised your lady that I should yield unto you."

"Ah!" said the duke, "are you that proud knight who proffered to fight with any of my followers? Make ready, sirrah; I must have a passage-at-arms with you, for I would know which of us is the better man."

So they spurred together, and Gareth smote the duke from his horse. But in a moment he was on his feet, sword in hand, and bidding his antagonist to alight and continue the battle on foot. Nothing loath, Gareth obeyed, and for more than an hour they fought, until both were sorely hurt. But in the end Gareth got the duke to the earth, and bade him yield if he would save his life. At this the duke lost no time in yielding.

"Then must you go," said Gareth, "unto my

lord King Arthur at the next feast, and say that I, Sir Gareth of Orkney, sent you."

"It shall be done," said the duke. "And I am at your command all the days of my life, with a hundred knights in my train."

This said, the duke departed, leaving Gareth there alone. But not long had he stood when he saw another armed knight approaching. Then Gareth took the duke's shield, and mounted, waiting the new-comer, who rode upon him without a word of greeting. And now, for the first time, Gareth met his match, for the stranger knight held his seat unharmed, and wounded him in the side with his spear.

Then they alighted and drew their swords, and for two hours they fought, till the blood flowed freely from them both.

As they thus fought there came that way the damsel Linet, riding on an ambling mule. When she saw them, she cried,—

"Sir Gawaine, Sir Gawaine, leave off fighting with thy brother Gareth."

When Gawaine, for it was indeed he, heard this, he threw down his shield and sword and ran to Gareth, whom he took in his arms, and then kneeled down and asked his mercy.

"Who are you," asked Gareth, "that one minute fight me so strongly and yield the next?"

"Oh, Gareth, I am your brother Gawaine."

Then Gareth unlaced his helm, and kneeled to him and asked his mercy. Both now rose and

embraced each other, weeping so that it was long before they could speak. When their voices returned they entered into a brotherly contest, for each insisted that the other had won the battle. As they thus stood in loving converse, the damsel Linet came up to them, and stanched their wounds, from which the blood was flowing freely.

"What will you do now?" she asked. "It seems to me that my lord Arthur should have news of you, for your horses are too bruised to carry you."

"It is well said," answered Gawaine. "Will you, fair damsel, bear word to him?"

Then she took her mule and rode to where the king abode, he then being at a castle scarcely two miles distant. The tidings she brought him cheered his heart wonderfully, for much had the disappearance of Gareth troubled him. Turning to his attendants, he ordered that a palfrey should be saddled in all haste.

When he was in the saddle he turned to the wondering lords and ladies and told them whither he went, bidding all who wished to greet Sir Gareth to follow. Then was there hasty saddling and bridling of queens' horses and princes' horses, and happiest were they who soonest got ready.

But the king rode on till he came where Gawaine and Gareth sat upon a little hill-side, and here he sprang from his horse and embraced Gareth as though he were his own son. Quickly behind him came his sister Morgause, who fell

into a swoon when she saw her dear young son. And the other knights and ladies came up in all haste, and great was the joy that all felt. After congratulations had passed, and the two brothers been removed to a place where their wounds could be attended to, the Dame Lioness was sent for, and came at the utmost speed, with her brother Sir Gringamore and forty knights.

Among all the ladies there she was the fairest and peerless. And when Gareth saw her, so loving were the looks and joyous the words between them, that all who beheld it were filled with delight.

Eight days passed before Gareth and his brother recovered from their wounds. Then Arthur came to him, with Guenever, and Morgause, and others of high degree, and asked him if he would have the Lady Lioness for his wife.

"My lord, I love her above all ladies living."

"Now, fair lady, what say you?" asked the king.

"Most noble king," replied Lioness, with blushing face, "my lord Gareth is more to me than any king or prince that was ever christened. If I may not have him, none will I ever have. My first love is he, and my last he shall be."

"And if I have you not as my wife," broke in Gareth, "never shall lady living give joy to my heart."

"What, nephew," said the king, "is the wind in that door? Then not for my crown would I

sever two such loving hearts, but would much prefer to increase than to distress your love."

And words to the same effect said Gareth's mother.

Then provision was made for a brilliant and joyous wedding, the king advising that it should take place on the Michaelmas following, at Kinkenadon by the seaside, where is a plentiful country. And so it was cried in all places through the realm.

Dame Lioness and the damsel Linet, with Sir Gringamore, now rode to their castle, where she gave Gareth a jewelled ring and received one from him, while Arthur gave her a rich bee of gold. Then Arthur and his following rode towards Kinkenadon. Gareth soon followed, and joined Arthur on his way.

Oh, the great cheer that Lancelot now made of Gareth, and Gareth of him; for there was never knight that Gareth loved as he did Lancelot. But he cared less for his brother Gawaine, who was revengeful, and disposed to murder where he hated, a feeling which the young knight abhorred.

When Michaelmas came near, Dame Lioness with her brother and sister rode to Kinkenadon, where they were lodged at the expense of King Arthur, who had prepared for them royally.

And upon Michaelmas day the bishop of Canterbury performed the wedding ceremony between Gareth and the Lady Lioness with all solemnity,

and in the presence of a noble and splendid gathering of the greatest lords and highest ladies of England's realm.

And here other weddings took place, for King Arthur devised that Gaheris should wed the damsel Linet, and that Agravaine should wed Dame Laurel, a fair lady, niece to the Lady Lioness.

When these weddings were done another solemnity took place; for there came into the church the various knights whom Gareth had overcome, each with his knightly followers, and with them the thirty ladies whom he had delivered from the brown knight, attended by many gentlewomen. All the knights did homage and fealty to Gareth, and the ladies kneeled and prayed heartily that happiness might be his lot throughout his life.

Afterwards there was high feasting, and all manner of games and revels, with the richest minstrelsy, and jousts that lasted three days. But the king would not suffer Sir Gareth to joust because of his new bride; for the Dame Lioness had desired that none who were newly married should joust at that feast.

On the first day Sir Lamorak won the honor of the lists, for he overthrew thirty knights and did marvellous feats of arms. And that day King Arthur made Sir Persant of Inde and his two brothers, Knights of the Round Table, and gave them great lands.

On the second day Sir Tristram jousted best, and overthrew forty knights. And on that day

the king made Sir Ironside, the Red Knight of the Red Lawns, a Knight of the Round Table, and gave him great lands.

On the third day the prize of valor fell to Sir Lancelot, who overthrew fifty knights and did such marvellous deeds that all men wondered at him. And now King Arthur made the Duke de la Rowse a Knight of the Round Table, and gave him great lands to spend.

Thus ended the festivities at the marriage of Sir Gareth of Orkney and the Lady Lioness. But Gareth and his lovely bride lived long and happily together afterwards, and much knightly renown he won, and great honor from all men.

END OF VOL. I.